

A
SCHOOL
CAMP-
FIRE

BY

E. OXENHAM



ILLUSTRATED BY
PERCY TAPPAN

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CAMP-FIRE



BY
ELSIE
OXENHAM

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Title: A School Camp Fire

Date of first publication: 1914

Author: Elsie J. Oxenham (ps. of Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley) (1880-1960)

Illustrator: Percy Tarrant (1855-1934)

Date first posted: August 2, 2026

Date last updated: August 2, 2026

Faded Page eBook #20260804

This eBook was produced by: Alex White, Hugh Stewart & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

A SCHOOL CAMP FIRE

BY

ELSIE JEANETTE OXENHAM

Author of

‘The Tuck-Shop Girl,’ ‘At School with the Roundbeads,’ ‘Girls of the Hamlet Club,’ &c.

ILLUSTRATED BY PERCY TARRANT

First published by *W. & R. Chambers, Limited*, 1914.

TO
THE GIRLS
WHO SIT WITH ME
AROUND THE CAMP FIRE
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
WITH LOVE AND ALL BEST WISHES
BY
THEIR GUARDIAN



Priscilla . . . burnt her old name.

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BOOK I.
BURIED TREASURE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FEVER-GIRL.

‘Fever-girl! Fever-girl!’

‘Come here, Gwennie!’ and an elder sister drew a baby behind her like a mother-hen.

Priscilla laughed, and tramped on up the hill. When she had first come to the moor, two years ago, this kind of thing had hurt her, and her laugh had been bitter as well as scornful. But she was fifteen now, and had no great desire for the friendship of small village children. She had forgotten she had ever been lonely; the moor had yielded her many friends, and she could afford to ignore these small enemies.

It was only a very little boy who had called after her. The bigger ones had given it up a year ago. What was the use of shouting at a girl who looked at you as if you were dirt, and then walked on without taking the trouble to answer? The amusement had long since ceased to be amusing.

The motherly elder sister was another matter, however. Priscilla was conscious of a hurt feeling as Gwennie disappeared hastily behind her sister’s frock.

‘Silly infants!’ she murmured; but the hurt feeling remained. As if it could do them any harm to speak to her! She knew the ignorance and prejudice of it, and had a deep contempt for all these ‘village people;’ but there were times when she would have liked to talk to the babies. It was out of the question, however. She had tried to make friends at first; but her overtures had been repulsed rudely, and she had not repeated them.

As she passed the ruined church and the last farm she laughed again, with more pity than scorn this time. ‘They are a silly lot! Thank goodness, I don’t care about one of them!’ and she turned at the corner to look beyond the town and away up the dale.

The reservoir, which supplied a great city with sweet moorland water, lay like a shimmering lake between low, green hills. It was easy to forget it was a reservoir; that was one of the facts Priscilla never allowed herself to face, on principle. It was a lake, as beautiful as any in Cumberland. Seen from this point, it gave the finishing touch to the landscape—flashing, or shining, or dull—blue or gray, silver or steel, but always fascinating. Seen close at hand, it was very beautiful, washing gently on its sandy beaches; and the great wall, with its turrets and battlements, which held it back from the long, green valley, did not spoil its beauty, but was interesting, giving one who stood upon it the feeling of being alone far out in the middle of the sea—a feeling which Priscilla appreciated to the full. She often walked over to the lake for the mere pleasure of crossing the big dam and standing out there in the wind.

She took a long look at it, then turned and climbed on up the steep hill road without a glance at the quiet, gray town in the dale. The road was a narrow lane winding between gray walls and rather dreary bare fields up and up to the moor. It was not her shortest way home; that lay by the great high-road, climbing the hill more gradually. But on the road there were motors and cycles and people, and clouds of dust and the smell of petrol and much noise. Few climbed the steep way but farmers and shepherds, and Priscilla. This road lay across the moor, and that more than made up for the extra climb.

The way was not so steep after the first stiff rise, but went on very deliberately up and up. Priscilla had a long, easy stride, and she was never out of breath. The steeper part of the hill she took slowly; now she stepped out more briskly, but turned now and then for a look over the great dale as it opened out beneath her and the added height showed her more and more of the opposite hill.

She settled her rucksack easily between her shoulders as she turned for the last time. She was on the crest now, and would see the dale no more. The opening moors lay before her, and

she breathed deeply, as she always did at this point. Here there was space, room to breathe and think, room to feel the wind. There was no longer a wall on her right hand, but wide open brown stretches and distant green hills beyond. She left the road, and took a narrow track through the heather, invisible to any one else, but very plain to herself. She had made it on her journeys to the village, and she thought she could have followed it in the dark. She had tried once, however, and had decided that, after all, high-roads were safer at night. There were patches of bright-green bog on each side of her track, and a step into one of them would have meant disaster. Her mother had begged her not to wander off the roads at night, and she had realised for herself that it would be unwise.

The rucksac was heavy, but she did not feel the weight, partly because of its position between her shoulders, more because she was used to it. She seldom carried anything but a stick in her hands; she had learned that long ago; but she generally had a stout walking-stick for company. Sometimes she carried a six-foot pole, and used it skilfully when she wanted to jump a patch of bog or a moorland stream. The rucksac and the jumping-pole were legacies from one of the few inmates of the hospital in whom she had taken any interest. As a rule she forgot all about the patients; they were the nurses' business, and she had nothing to do with them. But sometimes there were children, and when they were getting better she talked to them through the windows or over the garden fence. There had been the small boy who was a keen collector of birds' eggs, and her gifts of one plover's egg and one curlew's—she had rigidly refused to give him more than one—had been the brightest moments of his convalescence. She had supplied tadpoles in bottles to other youthful sufferers by way of comfort, and in autumn she knew that handfuls of bilberries would always be acceptable.

The original owner of her rucksac had been a climber, sampling the Pennine mountains on his way to Cumberland. He had spent a night at a farm where, the following day, the mother had developed scarlet fever; the infection had been traced to the milk, and, to the mountaineer's great annoyance, he had fallen ill a few days later. Happily for him, he had been passing through the city at the time, and had promptly been despatched to the isolation hospital. There, day after day, from his window, he had seen Priscilla striding across the heather, bareheaded, stick in hand, and had noted how, on her return from town with errands for everybody, and often with commissions for himself, she always carried her packages rolled into a bundle in a mackintosh and tied to her back with string. When he left the hospital, he had presented his rucksac to her, and had instructed her in the use of a jumping-pole, and these had added greatly to the pleasure of her expeditions ever since.

For once she carried a burden in her hands to-day, though to do so was much against her inclinations. Over her left arm lay a great sheaf of 'bluebells'—wild hyacinths—newly picked and just coming into flower, and warranted to last at least a week in water. She had gathered them on her way to town, in a lane where they grew thickly in banks of deepest blue by the roadside; it had been necessary to come straight home after shopping, because her load was so heavy. They lay easily in the hollow of her left arm, and her right hand was free for her stick.

She turned when she had gone a few yards down her path, and looked back to the road, where she had heard wheels. Then she dropped stick and flowers, and held out both hands, for the black-and-tan collie strolling beside the farm wagon was one of her friends. She knew every dog that was in the habit of crossing the moor with his master, and never failed to give them greeting. The collie pricked up his ears at the sound of her whistle, gazed a moment, then came bounding over the heather to hurl himself upon her. She laughed and hugged and clapped him, and then filled his cup of joy to the brim by inviting him to a game, setting him racing round and round in wide circles, laughing and gnashing his teeth at her, while she made a pretence of trying to catch him. A whistle from his master recalled him at last, and he gave

her a laughing good-bye and raced away. She laughed also, and picked up her stick and flowers again.

She had commissions for everybody in her rucksac. Stores were delivered regularly at the hospital, but there were always small extras needed in a hurry. There were stamps for Matron, groceries for her own mother's housekeeping, haberdashery trifles for one of the nurses, and sweets for another—no doubt more for some convalescent fever children than for nurse herself.

She smiled as she looked down at the hyacinths, and walked on, making plans. Could she get them in unseen? Would she be home in time? They were a present for her chief friend among the nurses, who had been away for three days. The flowers were to welcome her home.

For some months after her arrival at the hospital, which was quite a little settlement in the heart of bleak, bare moors, Priscilla had found herself lonely. Her mother held the post of caretaker, her father was an invalid, and the village children, urged thereto by their mothers, had made it plain that a girl from an isolation hospital was not a desirable friend. She might have nothing whatever to do with patients or infection, but that did not alter the facts. Priscilla came from the fever-hospital, and they were not to play with her.

She had been to a private school before 'things happened,' as she was wont to say concisely, and had been sufficiently far advanced to be beyond the necessary school standard, though only thirteen. Her mother's wish and her own inclinations had led her to continue her work to a certain extent; and the Matron, an elderly, kindly lady, had been interested in her from the first, and had urged her in the same direction, even giving her help and advice at times. Matron had been very good, Priscilla often thought, but scarcely realised how much her kindness had meant, even in matters of speech and behaviour. The fact that her only friends on the moor had been her mother, the Matron, and the nurses, had counted for more than she knew.

But it was when Nurse Mayne had come to the hospital that Priscilla had really known what friendship meant. The others had been kind, but had all been much occupied with their own affairs. But Nurse Mayne, who had joined the staff a year ago, had given Priscilla full and warm friendship. She was young, and Priscilla did not believe it was only love and gratitude which made her believe her to be exceedingly pretty. They had walked together on the moor, when nurse was off duty, and had talked for hours at a time. Priscilla knew all about her friend's home-life—the married elder sister, the clever one at college, and the little one still at school. And Nurse Mayne knew Priscilla's story; and while feeling there was little she could do to help, yet did what she could, and gave her friendship and warm interest. It was not such a little thing, after all; certainly it had meant much to Priscilla.

As she reached the top of a brown ridge of moor she stopped, for a carriage was creeping up the long drive which led from the high-road to the hospital. It was still a long way from the gates, but so was she. It would arrive first, and she would be too late to smuggle her flowers into nurse's cubicle as she had planned. So there was no hurry; the flowers would have to be given in some other way.

She slung her rucksac from her shoulders, and dropped it among the heather, and sat beside it on a big stone topping the ridge. The road ran below her; she would see her friend and wave a greeting to her, and a question which had been much in her mind would be answered.

Nurse Mayne had gone south three days ago because the little sister at school was not well, and was to be sent home. Her eyes were weak and had been giving her trouble, and the doctor had ordered her three months' rest in the country. That meant she must be out of school from the middle of June till the beginning of the autumn term, and just at present it was not convenient for her to go home. The married sister, whose husband was abroad, was staying

with her parents, and for Katharine to come home from school six weeks too soon would be decidedly awkward. Priscilla had heard all about it, and knew how worried every one had been. So Nurse Mayne, who was Katharine's elder sister Winifred, had gone home, and then on to London, to carry out a plan on which she had set her heart. Katharine must come to her. A month or two on the moors would be just what she needed; there was a spare cubicle she could have in the nurses' bungalow, and she could be out on the heather all day, and would not be allowed to look at a book for any reason whatever. As for the patients, she would, of course, never go near them. The bungalow was far from the wards; there was no possible danger of infection. However, Winifred had admitted privately to Priscilla that she knew it was not usual to invite schoolgirls to stay at isolation hospitals, and she had been prepared for opposition to her plan. She had gone south determined to argue every point, meet every objection, and bring Katharine back with her; and Priscilla, sitting in the heather, was keenly anxious to know if she had succeeded.

If Katharine had come, would it make any difference to her? Would she be friendly? It would be intensely interesting to meet a girl from a big London boarding-school. But Priscilla, with her previous experiences in her mind, knew she must not count too much on the future. Even Nurse Mayne might not be able to convince Katharine that to describe Priscilla as 'the fever-girl' was ridiculous and unkind. She might not be willing to be friends, and Priscilla was uncomfortably aware that she could never plead for herself. Friendship offered freely she would rejoice in, but she was too proud to beg and persuade. She would ignore Katharine as she ignored the village children if she saw any sign of unwillingness or even hesitation in her.

'I can get on all right without her, of course,' she said to herself, as she sat nursing her knees in the heather. 'But, all the same, it would be awfully jolly! It would make such a difference. I could show her everything, and she could tell me heaps. She's only thirteen, I know, but she'll know lots I don't know anything about. It's what I've always wanted—some one who wasn't too busy! I wonder if she's there!'

Her eyes were very wistful as she watched the approaching carriage. It was closed; at which she wondered, for the evening was fine, though the wind blowing down from the higher moors was cold. Priscilla was so much accustomed to it that she did not know it was cold; to her it was merely fresh and invigorating. She generally went bareheaded on the moor, and her hair seemed to have responded to this open-air treatment, for it was very thick and long and heavy, as if trying to make up for her lack of other covering. Like her eyes, it was rich dark brown, the colour of her beloved heather for nine months of the year. She always plaited her hair tightly before going out; but the wind teased and tore at it, and she felt untidy and tossed about before she reached home.

Her brown skirt was short, as was necessary for crossing the moor, and she wore a knitted jersey coat which had faded to a dull yellow. Her eyes wandered over these much-tried garments, which had served her all winter. 'If she is there, she'll think me an untidy object. But it would be simply silly to dress up here. I hope nurse will make her understand.'

She leaned forward eagerly for a glimpse into the carriage as it passed. Suddenly she started up, her eyes widening in great amazement. 'There are two of her! Two girls! She's there, but there's another one as well! How awfully queer!' And then the carriage had passed.

But she had evidently been seen, for as it went on towards the gates Nurse Mayne's head appeared at the window and she waved a greeting. Then the driver whipped up his horse, since the last bit of road was almost level, and Priscilla stood staring after them.

'Two girls! She's brought a friend with her! Then she won't want me; she won't be lonely. They'll be quite all right together,' she thought regretfully, as she shouldered her rucksack and walked on. 'It's jolly for her, of course; but I am sorry! I wonder why the other girl's come.'

CHAPTER II.

TWO SCHOOLGIRLS.

It had all seemed so simple to Winifred and Katharine.

There was nothing else to be done. But it had taken a good deal of argument to convince everybody, in the first place, that the hospital was the right place for Katharine to spend her unexpected holiday in, when her troublesome eyes gave out suddenly just before half-term; and, in the second place, that if she were going there, Dorothy had better go too. Of course Katharine wanted her, and of course Dorothy wanted to go. There was no question about that; the two were inseparable during term, and disliked holidays, because Katharine's home was in Yorkshire, and Dorothy's near London. The prospect of a three-months' separation had been too much for them, and they had both begged that if Katharine must go, Dorothy might go too.

There was much to be said for the plan, after all, for Dorothy had to go somewhere. A fortnight after the summer term had begun she had developed diphtheria, and had promptly been packed off to hospital. She had not been very ill, and now was almost herself again; but Miss Chinchin, her headmistress, very naturally preferred not to have her back at school till she had been away for a thorough change, and Winifred, when she heard about it from Katharine, had agreed.

'Dip.'s a nasty thing, and you don't want it in a school. She should be quite free from infection by now, but you can't be too careful. She ought to go away by herself for a while, and if her mother can't take her to the seaside' — —

'There's a baby-boy, a year old, who would have to go too, and Dorothy says she knows she'd kiss him. She couldn't help it, after not seeing him for a month.'

'She mustn't. She mustn't kiss anybody. I think she should certainly come with us, then, and I'll look after her. You shall sleep with me, and she shall have the other cubicle to herself, and then there'll be no possible danger. There isn't any, really, but it's as well to be extra careful. And I'd just as soon have two of you to look after as one.' At which Katharine laughed.

Winifred had interviewed Miss Chinchin and Dorothy and Dorothy's mother, and had succeeded at last in convincing them all that the girls would not really come in contact with the hospital at all; that she herself had to change and disinfect as a matter of routine when she came off duty; that they would be out all day in air as strong and sweet and health-giving as any in England; that she would keep a close watch on Dorothy for any unfavourable symptoms, and would not let her overtire herself or catch cold at first; that as Dorothy was officially certified free from infection, there could be no objection to her going away with Katharine, so long as kissing and sleeping together were forbidden; that she could manage two girls really more easily than one; and that, in fact, the only possible course was for her to take them both away to the moors at once. The proposal had helped Dorothy's parents out of a quandary, since she could not be sent to seaside lodgings alone, and her only aunts lived abroad. It had relieved Miss Chinchin's mind, and had thrown the girls themselves into a fever of delight and anticipation. They had already been parted for a month, and had dreaded another and much longer separation. Katharine had been very unwilling to go off into 'the wilds' alone, even with a favourite sister; Dorothy had never seen a moor, and was tired of seaside lodgings. To them both Winifred's plan sounded the height of bliss, since they were to be together.

They met at the train with rapturous faces, and Winifred had to be really stern to keep them from rushing into one another's arms. 'No kissing! Katharine, I thought you understood that was a condition! I can't let you out of my sight, evidently. — Perhaps you will be so kind

as to get our tickets?’ and she turned to Mr Nairn, who had brought Dorothy from the hospital. ‘I mustn’t lose sight of these silly children.’

‘Shake hands, then, chum!’ and Dorothy stretched out both hands. ‘Is that forbidden, please, nurse?’ she mocked.

‘No; only kissing. Shake hands as much as you like.’

‘O-o-oh! She’s shaken my arms right out!’ wailed Katharine. ‘You’ll have to massage my shoulders, Winifred; I know they’re out of joint. I don’t want to kiss her, silly old thing, getting things like dip-! It was all to get out of school, you know.’

‘What about your silly eyes?’ ‘Three months’ rest!’ What about getting out of school—yah! I always told you you’d do it, reading in bed as you do.’

‘I jolly well seem to have done it this time,’ Katharine said complacently. ‘But it’s not with reading in bed. You’re all behind the times, Dan. Things have changed while you’ve been loafing in hospital. We have to do beastly needlework with Mademoiselle three afternoons a week—in the summer term, too! Chinny’s discovered, or thinks she has, that none of us can sew a bit. So she’s having it put right, and ruining our eyesight. Ma’m’selle’s awfully particular; if you can see the stitches at all, they’re too big. I’ve been having frightful headaches.’

Dorothy snorted. ‘Considering what your stitches used to be like, my dear, I’m sorry for Ma’m’selle if she’s been trying to teach you to sew,—I always said Katharine must do her darning with a penholder,’ she remarked to Winifred.

‘Oh, well, darning— —’

‘She won’t be allowed to do any darning while she’s with me.’

‘Goody!’ chortled Katharine.

‘You shall do it for her,’ Winifred laughed to Dorothy.

She groaned. ‘You’ll have frightful blisters, Katharine! It really isn’t worth it, nurse. You’ll have to doctor her for corns and all kinds of things.’

‘You shall darn my stockings, Dan dear, while I go out on the heather,’ Katharine said kindly.

‘Why does she call you Dan?’ Winifred asked.

‘It’s my initials—Dorothy Ann Nairn. The girls call me Dorothy Ann, but Dan is Katharine’s special and particular. Nobody else is allowed to use it.’

‘She’s half a boy, anyway; so it fits her,’ Katharine explained.

They were in the highest spirits—over-excited, in fact; and Winifred foresaw that Dorothy, at least, would be very tired before the journey was over. She suggested that they should sit quietly and rest as soon as the train had started, but they had far too much to say.

‘We’ve a month to make up for,’ Dorothy urged. ‘Katharine has tons to tell me. Who’s cricket captain? How’s tennis getting on? When are the sports? Who’s swimming champion? Tell me all the news!’

‘Cricket! Tennis! Sports! Swimming! These are what we go to school for nowadays,’ Winifred laughed.

‘Oh, the rest doesn’t matter! We must talk, really, Miss Mayne. Katharine mustn’t read, you know; and I’m sure it would be bad for her to look out of the window all the time. It will keep her amused if I talk to her.’

‘Grandmother! If you talk so much it will be bad for your heart, I’m sure. Winifred says we’re to be careful of your heart for a little while.’

‘It is a bit funny sometimes,’ Dorothy acknowledged. ‘But it’s better than it was. Talking to you won’t upset it, I guess.’

‘Tell us all about it! Did they jab you with a needle? Whereabouts? And did it hurt? Van Evans has had it done to her.’

'Why are you so down on kissing?' Dorothy demanded of Winifred. 'I must be all right, or they wouldn't let me out, or in trains.'

'Quite all right. But even after you're all right a germ might be hiding in your throat, and you might pass it on if you kissed. You ought to keep that kind of thing to yourself, you know.'

'D'you really think there's one hiding in me?' Dorothy's eyes widened.

'No, I don't,' Winifred laughed. 'It's not the least likely. But although it's hardly probable, you have to think of what is possible.'

'They did all kinds of things to my throat before they'd say I was all right. They were awfully particular, and they nearly made me sick.'

'It's only one chance in several thousand, but I'd rather be prepared for it. You shouldn't kiss any one for some time.'

'But if I did take it you could just send me into the hospital and nurse me. It would be awfully convenient,' Katharine remarked.

Winifred laughed. 'I'm glad you kept back that remark till now, Katharine, my child. I could, of course; but I'm glad you didn't say so to Miss Chinchin. She'd have been still less willing to let you both come.'

'Oh, she's an old silly!' said Dorothy.

For a couple of hours they talked without a pause. Then Dorothy grew quieter, answering when spoken to, but staring dreamily out at the level fields most of the time. Presently she nodded, and then, to Katharine's intense amusement, fell asleep. Winifred, much relieved, quieted her sister with a quick, almost stern word.

'It's the best thing in the world for her. Be quiet, Katharine! Let her sleep as long as ever she can.'

The bustle at York woke Dorothy, much refreshed by her hour's rest, and she sprang out, very ready for lunch and quite unperturbed by Katharine's teasing.

'Lovely country, isn't it?' Katharine mocked. 'Awfully jolly things to look at—cathedrals and all kinds of things!'

'I believe she's been asleep herself! Has she, nurse? She'll have a frightful headache if she's been looking out all the way. Then I shall laugh!'

'You've both been asleep; and very sensible, too. I was afraid you, at least, would be knocked up if you kept up that chatter all the way. Now come and have something to eat!'

Not even a sleep in the morning, lunch at York, and tea at Harrogate could save Dorothy from being tired out by the time they left the train at last, and began the long drive up to the hospital. Both girls were very indignant when Winifred insisted that the carriage should be closed, but she was firm.

'I'm not going to have Dorothy knocked up with a bad cold as soon as she arrives. She's fagged to-night, and there's a north wind.'

'I thought we'd come here because the wind would be good for her,' Katharine grumbled.

'To-morrow you shall have all the wind you want. But we won't run any risks to-night. Walking in the wind is one thing; driving's quite another. To-morrow you shall see what you think of the moor. There's something I want you both to do for me,' said Winifred, to change the subject. 'I'm not going to tell you what it is. I think you'll find out for yourselves, and it will be more worth while if you do. But I'm very anxious you should do it.'

'You are mysterious! Won't you give us a hint?'

'I'll see first if you find out.—We're nearly there now,' she said presently, noticing Dorothy's weary look and Katharine's tired eyes. 'You see we've reached the moor. This long road is only for the hospital.'

‘See that girl!’ Katharine pointed to a yellow-clad figure sitting in the heather. ‘She looks just right for a moor, doesn’t she, Dan? No hat—no gloves—no nothing!’

‘Ripping! She just looks a bit of the moor.’

Winifred smiled. ‘That’s Priscilla.’

‘Priscilla? Oh, do you know her? Then we can too, can’t we? How jolly!’

‘Priscilla! How weird! I never knew a Priscilla before.’

‘Where does she live, Winifred? Anywhere near us?’

‘Oh, she lives at the hospital.’

‘Lives there? But she’s not got anything, has she?’

‘Except hair; she’s got tons of that.’

‘Oh no! She hasn’t got anything,’ Winifred laughed. ‘I’ll tell you her story, so far as I know it myself, after tea. Now, here we are!’ as they entered the hospital enclosure. ‘The wards are over there. This is the laundry. That cottage is where Priscilla lives with her mother and father. He’s an invalid. That is Matron’s little house, and we all go over there for meals, but to-night we’ll have a quiet tea in my cubicle. It will be a tight fit; nobody must sneeze or wriggle. This is the nurses’ bungalow; you see how far it is from the wards. Now, when you want to go out, you will either use the big gates or a little one you’ll find in the fence just behind the bungalow; and neither of you will ever, on any account, go beyond this drive in the direction of the wards. The first girl who wanders across that lawn will be fired out in double-quick time.’

‘Doesn’t she sound fierce?’ Katharine commented.

‘I thought you were going to be so jolly, nurse?’ Dorothy said plaintively.

‘I hope I’ll be able to be jolly; I want to be, on every point but this. But on this one point I intend to be the very opposite of jolly. It’s a point of honour, you see. I gave my word you shouldn’t go near any infection. If anything happened, I could never look your mother or ours or Miss Chinchin in the face again. So you must both play fair and help me.’

‘We will!’ Dorothy promised instantly. ‘I’ll keep an eye on Katharine.’

‘I’ll see to Dan, Winifred. You know *I’m* all right!’

Winifred laughed. ‘Then we should all be all right!’ and she led them down the passage to her cubicle, with the empty one for Dorothy next door.

CHAPTER III. PRISCILLA'S STORY.

'Now tell us all about Priscilla!' Katharine demanded,

They had had a very big tea, with lightly boiled fresh eggs—'From our own fowls,' Winifred explained. 'Priscilla and her mother look after them.' Dorothy was now resting on the bed, by order, and Katharine in the only arm-chair. Winifred sat on the window-sill and told them what she could.

'There really isn't much story to tell, but you'll soon see for yourselves that Priscilla isn't quite the kind of girl you'd expect her to be, living away in a place like this. I only mean in one sense, of course; in another way she's exactly what I should expect. But they are educated people; her mother is a very nice little lady. We rarely see the father. I understand that they lived in Leeds; that Priscilla went to a good school till she was thirteen—she's fifteen now; and that Mr Scarsby held quite a good position in some business. But I fancy he has always been rather queer, given to fits of depression and morbid anxiety for the future. Priscilla says as long as she can remember he has seemed to be haunted by the fear of losing his position or his money, and coming to actual want; or of dying or becoming unfit for work, and leaving them unprovided for. So he has always saved every penny he could, with the idea of being prepared for emergencies, and I gather that they had some difficulty in persuading him even to spare enough for her education. But her mother insisted.—Come in! Oh, those are lovely, Lizzie! Where did they come from?' as a maid brought in a great bowl of wild hyacinths for the table.

'Miss Priscilla was sorry she didn't coom hoam in time, so as they'd be ready for your tea, nurse,' said Lizzie.

'How very kind of her! Will you thank her very much from us all, please? They are beautiful!'

'“Coom hoam”!' mimicked Dorothy, as the door closed.

'Oh, everybody says it,' remarked Katharine.

'You used to yourself when you first came to school.'

'I'm sure I didn't!'

'Yes, you did, just a little. You're a lot better now, but it still comes out sometimes.—Are the flowers from Priscilla, then, nurse?'

'Did you notice that *Miss* Priscilla? We haven't told them to, and I'm sure she didn't. It's instinct—and perhaps the fact that she talks nicely, and holds herself so well. I expect she has been down to town and gathered them for us on her way. She says she is errand-boy to the establishment, but she's always willing for an excuse to cross the moor. Well, but I didn't tell you about her uncle, did I? Her father had a brother of whom he was very fond. One day some bank went wrong, in which all this brother's money was placed, and he was left penniless. The shock of it killed him, and at the same time seems to have unhinged Mr Scarsby's mind slightly.'

'It was just the kind of thing he'd always been afraid of,' Katharine nodded, listening intently.

'Hard lines! It would make him worse than ever. What did he do, nurse?' queried Dorothy.

'His savings were banked safely enough, and Mrs Scarsby thinks there must have been a good sum of money, though he would never tell her exactly. He was seized with a kind of fear that the same thing would happen to him. He withdrew all his money, though the bank was perfectly safe, and said he was going to take care of it himself. Then he disappeared, nominally on a fishing trip. He was a great fisherman, and used often to go off for a few days

alone up some of the dales where there is good fishing. But this time they believe he took the money with him, for no one has seen it since. He came back' — —

'Oh, Winifred! was it stolen from him?'

'They don't know. He came back, saying it was safe now, and it was only then they began to suspect there was really something serious wrong with him. Before, they had thought he was just a little queerer than usual, and hoped his fishing holiday would put him all right. He told them he had "hidden" the money safely, and would fetch it when they wanted it, and then he collapsed altogether, and had a long illness, and when he got over it he'd forgotten all about it.'

'Oh! Oh, what hard luck! And did he never tell them where he'd put the money?'

'Did they never find it?' Katharine asked pitifully. 'What did they do?'

'He never told them, and they never found it. All his brain-power seems to have gone. He's very gentle and quiet; you don't need to be afraid of him. Just speak to him if you meet him; he likes it. He does whatever they want, in a quiet way; but he isn't strong, and never goes far from home. Of course, we can't depend on him for anything, any kind of work, even gardening. He isn't reliable; if you gave him directions he'd forget them and do the work all wrong, or wander away in the middle of it.'

'So the mother has to work for them all?'

'She heard of the post of caretaker in this hospital through a friend, and applied for it, hoping that the air of the moor would be good for him; he was always keen on the moors. She is supposed to look after the buildings when there are no patients; when the hospital is in use, as it generally is, she was at first expected to keep this bungalow and Matron's house in order, and act as a kind of charwoman. But—wait a minute!' —as they exclaimed in dismay. 'She did that at first. Then one day Matron had to dismiss her cook in a hurry for dishonesty, and Mrs Scarsby stepped into the breach, and cooked for them so well that Matron asked her to keep on as cook, and engaged Lizzie as housemaid. Mrs Scarsby likes the work, and can cook anything; she's as good at invalid cookery as at ordinary work, and that's valuable here. Of course, she never goes near the wards; and, of course, Priscilla helps her a good deal, besides attending to the fowls and acting as messenger; we're on the telephone, but when things have to be fetched in a hurry she's always ready. Look out here, for instance!'

They sprang up and came to look over Winifred's shoulder, and all watched as Priscilla came round the corner from the cottage, and left the hospital enclosure by the little wicket-gate in the fence. Her rucksack hung empty at her back, and she carried her long jumping-pole. She went off across the moor with long, easy strides, her thick hair blown back as she faced the wind, her brown plait tossed about.

'Doesn't she ever wear a hat? It looks awfully jolly.'

'I like the yellow coat! It's faded to such a jolly colour,' Katharine commented.

'She sometimes wears a hat in summer if the sun's altogether too strong, or in winter when the rain's really too heavy. Both are very fierce up here.'

'What's the pole for? She isn't a Girl Guide, is she?'

'She'll be a very good girl guide to you if you ask her to show you the moor. She knows every inch of it. The pole is to help her to jump across streams and patches of bog.'

'How ripping! I wonder if she'd let me try!' cried Dorothy.

'You mustn't, because of your silly heart, you know,' Katharine said instantly. 'Now, there's nothing to stop *me*! I shall ask her to teach me to-morrow.'

'Pig!—Where is she going now, nurse?'

'To the farm for eggs, I expect. We have fowls, but we don't get nearly enough eggs. We use a great many. So Priscilla fetches them from a farm about two miles away.'

‘How many miles does she walk each day?’ Dorothy asked curiously. ‘You said she’d been all the way to the town this afternoon.’

‘Oh, miles and miles! Fifteen, if need be, or more. She thinks nothing of it.’

Dorothy sighed enviously. All her tastes lay towards out-of-door life and active occupations, and her month in hospital had been a severe trial. So was the restriction placed on her energies at the present moment.

‘How long is my silly heart going to go on being a nuisance? I will try to be careful, for they told me some horrid stories at the hospital—to scare me, I suppose. They did it, anyway. But when will it be all right, Miss Mayne?’

‘Very soon now, if you take care for a little while and get strong in other ways. But I don’t advise jumping exercise just at first. I think you must leave that to Katharine.’

‘Don’t be a donkey, Dorothy Ann Nairn! D’you think I’d make you feel bad by jumping when you can’t?’ Katharine asked indignantly. ‘Don’t you be so silly! We’ll let Priscilla do the jumping, and we’ll walk round the pools like old ladies. If you have to crawl on your hands and knees I’ll crawl too, and if you need a bath-chair we’ll both ride in it, and she shall push. —I’m going to take care of her, Winifred; she’ll be all right. And she’s going to take away every book she sees me reading and sit on it. We’ve got it all planned out. On wet days *I’m* going to be the old lady, and she’s going to read aloud to me. I’m going to do knitting, because I don’t need to look at that.’

Winifred laughed. ‘What a beautifully domesticated picture—you knitting and Dorothy reading aloud! I don’t think it would last long. Oh, I’ll find you something to do on wet days; or perhaps Mrs Scarsby would give you cooking lessons, and you could help Priscilla. She prepares things in the kitchen, cuts up vegetables, makes breadcrumbs and peels potatoes, and so on, and then washes up when her mother has finished.’

‘I’m sure I could peel potatoes! When can we make friends with Priscilla?’

‘Not to-night. You’re both going off to bed. And to-morrow I shall have to go on duty, so you must manage Priscilla for yourselves.’

‘Will she be friendly? Is she jolly?’ Katharine asked suddenly.

‘She’ll be friendly if she thinks you really want her.’

‘Well, give my love to the dip. patients, and tell them not to sit up too suddenly,’ said Dorothy.

‘It’s my business to see that they don’t. Now suppose you say good-night—carefully, remember!’

They shook hands solemnly at arm’s length. ‘Nasty slobbery habit kissing!’ Dorothy said seriously. ‘I can’t imagine why people want to do it. Shaking hands is much more hy—hy—something or other. I heard lots about it at the hospital.’

‘You do swank about that hospital!’ exclaimed Katharine. ‘Sounds as if you thought no one had ever had dip. but you!’

‘Oh, I learnt a lot of things you know nothing about! I’ve had experiences!’ Dorothy retorted.

CHAPTER IV.

PRISCILLA'S SHOPPING.

Priscilla, walking lightly across the heather, was thinking of the schoolgirls as they were thinking of her. She was rather sorry there were two of them. Probably they would be sufficient company for one another. One girl might have been lonely; but two, and two who were such great friends that they cared to go away for a holiday together, would not be likely to want a third. She wondered if she would see much of them, and what they would do all day, and why the second girl had come, and what she was called. Priscilla looked down, as she had done before, at her short useful skirt and faded coat, and wondered if they would think her very shabby—quite unconscious that the dull yellow toned admirably with the deep brown of her dress, and that her hair and eyes were of the same warm shade, the colour of the rolling moors for the greater part of the year, soft and rich as velvet.

Not that the moor was all deep brown! There were the vivid green circles of moss in which she would plant her pole, feeling carefully for a sure footing before leaping across. There were wide patches of brilliant red, streaked with green when looked at closely, but bright red in the distance, where the young bilberry-shoots coloured all the slope; and sombre black stretches, where the heather had been burnt in the autumn. Everywhere there were bright green dots, where the young bracken was beginning to show, still curled tightly down close to its stem; and everywhere also were the golden stars of tormentil or white stars of stitchwort, or the low blue, white, and pink heads of milkwort, humble and tiny, but colouring the ground with its many spikes. But the chief colour, and the only colour at any distance, was that deep warm brown which Priscilla wore herself and loved almost as much as the royal glow of autumn.

She had hesitated for one moment before going out. There was a new dress hanging in her cupboard, and it was only human girl nature to wonder if she ought not to wear it to-night. Was there any chance of meeting the visitors? It was not pleasant to feel shabby, and she had worn her old brown skirt and yellow coat all winter. She knew the skirt was short, and the coat faded. Would it not be only sensible— Then common-sense had come to her help and saved her. It would be 'simply silly' to dress up to cross the moor—to wear her only good dress to fetch home eggs! And, in any case, why should she care what two other girls thought? She did not realise that they had seen her once already, and that if she had appeared in a new and quite unsuitable dress they would have been the first to condemn her as trying to 'show off,' and would never have forgotten it. Fortunately she had been saved from such a mistake; and laughing at herself for being so silly, she had put on her old coat and set out. 'But I don't want them to think me too shabby to be spoken to!' she acknowledged.

She thought as she went of how she had bought that new dress, and smiled at the remembrance. It had been the jolliest day she had spent for months.

She had been saving up all winter, for she was quite determined not to go through another summer without a new and longer dress, and equally determined that when she did have one it should be a good one. Her mother's salary left little to spare, and there were three of them to clothe and feed. Such things as boots and underclothes were necessary; boots were a heavy item where Priscilla was concerned; but they were not particularly inspiring. She was willing that her mother should provide these, if in doing so she did not have to go without necessities for herself or Mr Scarsby. But where new dresses were concerned Priscilla was growing independent. She had made a secret resolve to earn her own summer dress, and had worked hard to do so.

That was one way in which the Matron had been so kind. She was an elderly lady, and not very strong. Any work which meant stooping was forbidden her. One day in the spring, a year

before, Priscilla had seen her walking round the hospital garden, sighing over the weeds, but unable to cope with them. She had offered to help, under directions at first, and Matron had received the idea with enthusiasm.

‘Sixpence an hour!’ she had said promptly. ‘Yes, of course, I shall pay you for your time. I should have to give that to any man or boy, and I can’t get one up here. You’re worth more, for you’re on the spot and I can have you when I want you. Sixpence an hour, my dear girl, and I’ll be grateful to you for ever as well.’

Priscilla had laughed and protested, but to no purpose. On those terms she could have all the work she wanted in the garden, but on no others.

‘I’ll do it for love, because you’ve always been so jolly to me,’ she had tried to insist. ‘You’ve lent me books, and shown me things, and helped me in heaps of ways. And I’d like the garden to look tidy.’

‘Sixpence an hour, and well worth it!’ and since Matron had insisted, of course she had got her way.

So Priscilla had weeded vigorously but carefully, and by her mother’s advice and in spite of her father’s experiences, had presently started a bank-account at the post-office. She had little need of money for trifles, but much for big things; so she had worked and saved until the new dress began to seem almost a possibility.

By the time the garden-beds were cleared of grass and thistles and the edges neatly clipped, Matron had grown ambitious.

‘If you’re going on helping me like this, I don’t see why we should be content with shrubs and evergreens! We’ll send for some bulbs for next spring, and raise some batches of perennials; and in the meantime we’ll put in a few annuals for this summer;’ and she had found a seed catalogue and taken the delighted Priscilla into consultation.

Under her directions Priscilla had dug and sown and planted out, working eagerly with keen interest in the garden and few thoughts for the growing bank-account. That summer the garden-beds between the different buildings and bordering the lawns and entrance-drive had been very neat, with a few clumps of forget-me-nots, poppies, and pansies, and rows of Virginia stock, among the evergreen shrubs, the holly and privet and rhododendrons, which had seemed sufficient, to the authorities. But in the spring there had been rows of wallflowers and banks of daffodils, which represented many a back-breaking hour and many an addition to the bank-account; and now in June, while the wallflowers were still sweet, clumps of antirrhinum, lupin, and delphinium were thrusting up their spikes, and borders of pansies were everywhere. Nasturtiums and sweet-peas were coming on, and Priscilla had been rich enough to go to Nurse Mayne the night before she left for London, and ask shyly, ‘Do you have to wait long for your train in Harrogate to-morrow morning, nurse? I want to do some shopping, and I thought perhaps—and mother thought so too—you might have to wait, and might be willing to help me, if I went that far with you.’

‘I’ve over an hour to wait,’ Winifred had said promptly. ‘I’ve been wondering what I should do with myself. I think it’s more than two hours!’ hastily deciding that a later train would do just as well. ‘I’d be delighted to help you, Priscilla. I should enjoy it. But couldn’t your mother go too?’

‘She can’t very well get off. The dinners are rather extra special just now.’ Winifred, with certain delicate patients in her mind, nodded. ‘She doesn’t much want to go to town, either, and it means leaving father. If you wouldn’t mind helping me’ —

‘I’d like to very much.’

So next morning they had set off together, Priscilla full of the excitement of a rare holiday, but rather weighed down at first by the importance of her shopping and the fact that she was carrying all her earnings for the last year.

'I want to buy presents for everybody! It's such a change to spend some money. But, of course, I know I can't. I must buy the dress, or everybody will laugh at me. But I'm going to buy some slippers for mother—she needs them badly—and some flowers for Matron, roses or something we can't grow. She loves flowers, and she has been awfully good to me. I think that's all, except my own shopping.'

The choice of the dress had taken time, but Nurse Mayne knew Harrogate well, and steered her successfully past the more expensive shops, whose prices reduced her to despair, to others where ready-made garments could be found at more reasonable figures. Priscilla was not fond of sewing, and had refused to consider the idea of making her dress.

'I should never be satisfied with it. And mother doesn't want me to try. She doesn't feel able to help me. A dress is a big thing to start on when you've never made anything in your life. I'd rather do gardening, or run errands! I don't think I'll be difficult to fit. I'm sure I'm a very ordinary size.'

That had proved to be the case. To Winifred's relief, Priscilla's taste, which was very decided and would have been difficult to argue with, had proved to be good. She had fallen in love with a simple dress of a soft shade of blue, and it had fitted her without needing much alteration. To her delight, it had cost less than she had expected, and she had been able to add to it a short white coat which had taken her fancy greatly.

'I feel really greedy buying two things, though!' she had protested.

'Nonsense! You'd have had to get a coat later. A dress isn't much use alone. Now I'm going to buy you a hat. Yes; don't make any objections! You can't wear a nice dress and coat without a hat and gloves. The hat is a present from Matron; I was to tell you it's a bonus, because you're always willing to do her work just when she wants it. It's one thing to get it done; that's what she's been paying you for. But it's another thing to get it done just at the minute she asks for it. She knows she can depend on you, whether it's for the garden, or a message to town, or to go to the farm when we run short of eggs, or to help indoors when we're short-handed. And she says it's well worth something extra, so I'm to get you a hat to match your frock. I fancy a soft white straw with that particular blue shade of ribbon or scarf. What do you think?'

'I think it's far too good of her! And I'll feel so rich that I'll want to come down to Harrogate every Saturday to wear all my new things.'

'Not every Saturday! But perhaps we might come more often than we have done. And there are other places!'

'It won't be difficult to come more often!' Priscilla had laughed rather tremulously, for the unexpected kindness had touched her deeply.

Winifred had still half-an-hour to wait for her train when the purchases had all been made, so she had insisted on lunch in a café near the station, and Priscilla had sat at a table by the window watching the crowds with happy, excited eyes.

'Isn't it queer to look out there'—and she nodded at the busy street and thronged station square—'and then think of our moor, where you can walk for hours and see nobody but farm-carts and plover?'

'It is queer, isn't it? Which do you like best?' and Winifred looked at her curiously.

'Oh, the moor! This is interesting for a little while, but I couldn't live here now. We used to live in town, you know. I'd get tired here very soon, I think.'

'You're never tired,' Winifred remonstrated.

'I used to be when we lived in town. I like to do what I like, and wear what I like, and behave as I like, and go where I like, and you can't here.'

'You certainly can't. For instance, I must go if I'm to catch my train. Come and find the platform for yours, and then I'll leave you there.'

‘I’m just awfully obliged to you, nurse! I’ve had a perfect day.’

‘You’ve spent a lot of money! I hope your mother will like all your purchases. Give my love to everybody at the hospital!’ and then Winifred had had to hurry away to catch her train.

So, as Priscilla crossed the heather on her way to the farm for eggs, she could not help thinking of the new dress she had not yet worn. But she realised how unsuitable it would be for such an errand as her present one; so she put away the thought resolutely, and did not dream that Katharine and Dorothy had seen her go, and were envying her her old clothes and bare head and jumping-pole, and the health and strength to cross the moor alone in all weathers.

‘At least it’s nice to know it’s there!’ was her final judgment on the blue frock. ‘Even if I hardly ever wear it, it’s something to know I’ve got it. And everybody thinks it’s pretty. Now when I get home I’ll plant out those last antirrhinums; they’re going to flower this year, the dears! And I’d better have sixpence or so in my pocket, just in case’ — — and she nodded thoughtfully. ‘I might be glad of it!’

CHAPTER V.

PRISCILLA LEADS THE WAY.

Priscilla was helping her mother to wash up next morning, with the kitchen window wide open, when the sound of laughter and girl-voices made her look out. It was so unusual.

The visitors were going towards the big gates. They had discarded the travelling coats and skirts in which they had arrived, and wore knitted jerseys and caps. One girl was brown-haired, with a thick, heavy mane, and she wore pink; the other had long yellow curls, and her coat and cap were brown. Both wore green frocks, of which Priscilla could see little so far, and brown shoes and stockings.

They were laughing and whispering as they went, each apparently urging the other to something. 'You!' 'No, you!' 'I can't. You'd do it so nicely!' 'That's silly! You're the oldest!' 'But people always do things for you!' The words came clearly through the open window.

Priscilla laughed at sight of the brown girl's hanging mane and the yellow one's curls. There would be some fine tangles to-night! The yellow one was Katharine of course; her likeness to Nurse Mayne was unmistakable. It was she who 'would do it so nicely,' and for whom 'people always did things!' What could it be the elder girl wanted and would not do herself?

They reached the gate, and stood there, laughing and hesitating. Then suddenly they caught hands and came running back together, but not to the bungalow. To Priscilla's surprise, they turned towards the kitchen, and she drew back quickly from the window, but heard their voices clearly still as Katharine stopped short in dismay.

'I forgot your silly heart! I say, is it all right? Is it still going? Is it there?' she asked anxiously. 'I'm awfully sorry' — —

'It hasn't stopped this time! But you'll have to do the asking. I'm shy. It would make me nervous.'

'Shy! Oh, Dorothy Ann! But I will do it, because I made you run.'

Katharine came to the kitchen door and knocked, and Dorothy was close behind her as Mrs Scarsby opened it.

'Oh, please, Mrs Scarsby, won't you lend us Priscilla for the morning? Couldn't you spare her to-day? We want to go out on the moor, and we're afraid we'll fall into bogs or get lost. My sister says Priscilla knows every heather-bush on the moor. Mayn't she come with us, please?'

Katharine had a very persuasive manner, and knew how to use it. Mrs Scarsby laughed, and looked at Priscilla, who came forward, still drying a milk-jug. 'I dare say she would like to. Oh, I could manage without her' — —

'Oh, she's here herself!—Now, Dan, it's your turn! I've done my share;' and Katharine unexpectedly resigned her post, thus basely forcing her friend to do her share.

Dorothy laughed. 'Will you come? Please do! We need you awfully. We haven't an idea where to go, or how to get back when we get there.'

Priscilla's eyes danced. 'I really think perhaps I'd better. But are you sure you want me?'

'It will make it twice as jolly if you'll come,' Dorothy said eagerly.

'We don't want only to have one another to talk to. We talked all day yesterday. We're sisters, you know,' Katharine explained seriously, 'and you never saw two sisters who wanted to talk to one another *all* the time, did you?'

'Sisters?' Priscilla, taking down her yellow coat from a peg, turned, looking startled. 'I didn't understand that.'

'Adopted sisters, you know. She's Dorothy Ann Nairn. I'm Katharine Mary Mayne.'

'Oh, I see! I thought for a moment you meant it.—You're sure you can spare me, mother?'

'Yes, dear. But try to be back half-an-hour before dinner-time, to help me then.'

'Wait just a minute, please!' Priscilla disappeared, and came back presently wearing her rucksack, but offered no explanation. 'Now I'm ready;' and she took up her walking-stick.

'I've only brothers,' Dorothy explained, as they set out, 'and Katharine's sisters are all grown-up, so we're in the same boat so far as sisters go. So we adopted one another two years ago.'

'I'll tell you how we know we're really sisters! We can say anything we like to one another, and the other one always understands. We never get the hump at one another; we never get cross. It's awfully convenient.'

'Are sisters never cross? I haven't had a chance to find out.'

'Well, they understand one another, anyway. They know when it's only a joke. That's how I feel with Dorothy Ann.'

'Dorothy Ann?' Priscilla looked at Dorothy in surprise. 'They don't call you that all the time, do they?'

'They do when I can manage it. I can't get everybody to, of course.' Dorothy Ann sank down on a big rock at the top of the heather slope, and gazed out across the moor. 'I say, isn't there a lot of it? I like it. But I want a rest; going up places makes my silly heart jump still. I've had dip., you know, and it makes your heart jumpy for a bit.'

'And she swanks frightfully about it, just because she's found out she's got a heart!—All right, Dorothy Ann! Sit still, like a good old lady, and you'll soon be all right! It gives me a chance of a good look at the moor. Isn't it a ripping colour?' Katharine looked at Priscilla. 'It's like you somehow. The colour makes me think of you.'

'Perhaps I've absorbed some of it,' Priscilla laughed. 'I'm up here half my time. It's glorious in August. But do you really want people to use your whole name?'

'She tries to make us. I do it just to please her.—Don't I, Dorothy Ann?'

'Rather! There are so many Dorothy's. I like to be different, and have my name all my own. But there's more reason than that. I've got two aunts.'

'Yes?' Priscilla asked doubtfully.

'All our family are boys; there are six of them—four before me and two after. They aren't all at home now, of course, but that's how the family goes—all boys. And father never had any sisters, and mother was the only girl in her family. It's boys everywhere; even among cousins I'm the only girl in the connection; there are tons of boys. Awfully rotten luck for me, but mother seems glad I'm not another boy. But father has two old aunts, who have never married, but always lived together—Aunt Ann and Aunt Dorothy—see? When I turned up after all those boys, and they could believe that I was really and actually a girl by way of a change, the aunts begged mother to call me after them both. They said they'd never had a girl called after them. They're very old, and rather sweet, and she wanted to please them; so she did it, and of course they call me Dorothy Ann. They'd be frightfully hurt if they thought the Ann was being forgotten. So I think I ought to stick to Ann too. They're in Switzerland now, for Aunt Dorothy's ill and can't live in England; so a year ago they sold up their home—they had a beautiful old house—and went to live abroad. Mother says it has lengthened Aunt Dorothy's life by months. I don't know what Aunt Ann would do without her; they're just everything to one another—like Katharine and me! So I try to make people call me Dorothy Ann.'

'And do they do it? At home and school?'

'At home they do, though it's more of a joke than anything else. Most of the girls do at school; but the mistresses—well, you know what they are!'

'If her home name had been Dolly, they'd have called her Dorothy, and said they couldn't have pet names at school. As it's Dorothy Ann, they say Dorothy's quite enough. They never

call you what you want to be called, if they can help it,' Katharine explained.

'And there are three Dorothys in our form already. I should have thought they'd be glad to make a difference. You see, I won't—I simply will not—be called Dolly or Dot or—or Dotty, or any other baby-name. Dorothy's all right, if there weren't so many of them, but all the short names for it are so silly.'

'Oh, Dorothy's a beautiful name! And there are no other Dorothys here. Am I to remember the Ann too?'

'I always like people better if they do!'

'Oh, then, I'll try,' Priscilla said hastily.—'And you aren't Kitty, or Kathie?' and she turned to Katharine.

'No! Nor Kat. I'm not a kitten.'

'I'll remember,' Priscilla laughed.

'Dan's rested now. Let's go on.—Come on, old lady!' and Katharine held out her hand to her friend.

'Dan?' Priscilla asked in surprise.

'Short for the whole of it. Besides, she spells Dan, and it suits her; she ought to have a boy-name.'

'I've been more with boys than girls,' Dorothy Ann laughed. 'Where are you going to take us, Priscilla? Can we go where those bluebells came from? They're all over with us at home; May is bluebell month.'

'It's June up here. We're later than you near London. But I thought you wanted to see the moor?'

'We do, awfully. Don't they grow on the moor?'

Priscilla laughed. 'No! In the woods and lanes, away down in the dale.'

'Oh, sorry! I didn't know. I'm not used to moors. Then we'll go and see them another time.'

'Take us over the moor—that's what we want—and show us everything. What's this, for instance—all these dinky little gold stars in the heather?' Katharine asked.

'That's tormentil. You'll find it everywhere up here. That creeping pink thing is red rattle; yellow rattle is down in the fields—heaps of it.'

'How queer! And these ducky little blue spikes? They turn the whole bank blue.'

'Milkwort.' Priscilla began to search in the heather, and presently held out two more sprays. 'These are the same.'

'But—why, how funny! Those are pink and white! And yet it is the same!' Dorothy Ann cried.

'Yes, there are the funny side wings;' and Katharine came to look. 'Does it grow in all colours, then?'

'All those three. I don't know which is prettiest'

'I like the pink;' and Katharine stuck a sprig into her brown coat.

'I'll have white,' said Dorothy Ann, and ornamented her pink coat in the same way.

'Then the blue for me,' Priscilla laughed, and showed them the waxy pink bells of the bilberry as they went along.

'I love the red leaves! It's a gorgeous colour! They're prettier than the flowers,' Katharine exclaimed.

'She's artistic,' Dorothy Ann laughed. 'She's awfully keen on colours. Her painting's not half bad. But she mustn't do any now, of course.'

'Pig! You needn't keep reminding me, Dorothy Ann!'

'You don't have to wear glasses?' Priscilla asked.

‘Not if I rest my eyes now. I’m not short-sighted, you know. I can see’—and Katharine gazed around—‘oh, as far as you can, I guess! I can see those two rock things standing up on the hill over there across the dale!’

‘They’re not rocks. We’ll go and see them some day. I’m glad that your eyes will come all right again.’

‘I get headaches if I do work. I’d need glasses if I had to do much just now. But they say I’ll be all right if I rest all summer and don’t overdo it afterwards. It’s a ripping excuse for needlework-time!’

‘She’s rather pleased about it,’ Dorothy Ann remarked. ‘She’s going to make the most of her groggy eyes next term. Oh, what’s that funny thing, Priscilla?’

‘Cotton-grass;’ and Priscilla brought a handful of stems crowned by blowing tufts of white. ‘It is queer, isn’t it?’

‘You do know things! How did you find out all the names?’

‘I didn’t know anything when we came, two years ago. I’d lived in town and never been on a moor for more than a day at a time. Matron helped me to find out things. She has a book with coloured plates, and she lets me have it whenever I find anything new. If you’re fond of flowers, there’s something I’d like to show you when your heart is used to climbing hills, Dorothy Ann.’

‘It’s getting on. Where are you taking us to-day?’

‘To a favourite place of mine;’ and Priscilla led them wandering over the moor by tiny paths they would have passed unnoticed.

First she took them to a spot whence they could look all up and down the long green dale, six hundred feet below, with dense dark woods, and yellow buttercup meadows, and a winding river, and gray old towns and villages. Then farther on she showed them the shining lake at the head of the dale, among its low green hills, and promised to take them there some day soon. Then they turned from dale and lake, from woods and fields, and faced only brown rolling moor, and plunging into the dry heather by another winding path, found themselves treading on soft white sand.

‘How ripping! I thought it would be all rock up here! I’d like to go barefoot,’ Dorothy Ann cried eagerly.

‘I’ve done it. It’s very jolly. The heather tickles, of course, and there are ants and beetles, but if you don’t mind them it’s all right.’

‘I don’t mind. We’ll go barefoot someday. And I’m going to learn to jump with your pole soon too. You’ll let me use it, won’t you?’

‘I’d eat beetles and ants if I could catch them. I’m just starving,’ Katharine vowed. ‘Show me some beetles, Priscilla—big ones!’

‘I’m starving too. And yet we had a huge breakfast.’

‘Perfectly enormous. Dan ate two eggs, Priscilla! Think of it—after porridge!’

‘It’s the wind,’ Priscilla laughed. ‘Come this way now.’

‘I really think we’d better go home for something to eat, you know. Beetles might not agree with us,’ Dorothy urged.

‘Oh, what a weird stone!’ cried Katharine, as they reached the top of a slight slope and looked into a big shallow cup, scooped out of the heather. In the middle of it stood a great gray boulder, many times larger than any they had seen so far, as big as a house; and crowded together round its base and underneath it were a number of smaller ones, as if they had rolled there for shelter.

‘It’s the Hen and Chickens Rock,’ Priscilla explained. ‘You find these queer rocks in all kinds of shapes here and there on the moors. There’s the Cow and Calf at Ilkley, and the Toad’s Mouth on the hill across the dale. And there’s one place where there are hundreds of

them all together, all with names; there's the Druid's Altar, and the Idol, and the Yoke of Oxen, and the Monkey's Face, and the Lover's Leap, and the Pivot Rock, and the Dancing Bear, and heaps more. From this side this one is quite like a sitting hen.'

'I think it's far more like an elephant.'

'Oh, I think it's like a hen!' Katharine caught the resemblance more quickly. 'All those little ones are the chickens getting under her wings—I see!'

'In between the chickens, where you see those holes, there are wee caves, and if you aren't too big you can crawl into them,' Priscilla suggested.

'Come on!' and Dorothy Ann forgot her heart, and raced down the slope.

'We're not too big, are we?' and Katharine raced after her, and caught her just in time. 'I won't have you exploring without me, Dorothy Ann!'

Priscilla laughed, and ran too; but they were already exploring the cracks and corners and tiny caverns, Katharine on her hands and knees, because she was small and could be pushed through narrower slits than Dorothy Ann, both exclaiming in delight at the floor of silver sand between the boulders.

'Let's have houses! You choose one, Dan, and I'll come and call and ask for your husband, and how your daughter's getting on at the isolation hospital, and if it was a very sharp attack.'

'Baby! All right, I'll have this ducky little cave. You can be next door.'

'I'm going to decorate mine with bracken and bilberry.'

'I often keep house here,' and Priscilla swung the rucksack from her shoulders. 'I thought you'd like it. Now we'll have some biscuits!' and she began to unbuckle the straps.

'Biscuits!' and they eyed her hungrily. 'Oh, Priscilla, have you really got biscuits?'

'Don't tease us, Priscilla! We're hungry enough to eat our boots.'

'What about chocolate?' and Priscilla laughed at their hungry faces.

'You're a perfect dear! How did you think of it?'

Priscilla handed each of them two big hard biscuits and a cake of chocolate. 'I never go out for the morning without something. I know how hungry you get, and there's nothing to eat up here. But there's a spring of good water just out there, if you're thirsty.'

'You're a real fairy godmother!' Katharine vowed, crunching contentedly.

'She's like the Swiss Family Robinson mother. Have you anything else in that bag? I'd got quite a pain. Really, I didn't think I could walk home.'

'Oh, you aren't far from home. We came round. We're only ten minutes' walk from the hospital.'

'Really? Oh, then, I say, let's stop here! I like this!' and Dorothy Ann slipped off her coat and lay on the heather in much enjoyment.

Katharine did the same. 'This is blissful! We are having a joy-day!' she sighed happily. 'I say, Dan, think of parsing and analysis! It is Thursday, isn't it? I feel all mixed up already.'

'Think of *dictée*, and French translation, and algebra!'

'And needlework!' and Katharine's cup of happiness was full.

'Why are you dressed alike?' Priscilla looked curiously at the green sailor frocks, with wide collars trimmed with brown braid, and brown belts and ties, which were so neat with the brown shoes and stockings.

Dorothy Ann laughed. 'Gym. tunics. Green and brown are the school colours. Everybody has green sailor suits for gym. The infants look funny little dots in them, and the seniors are all legs; but they're just right for the Middle School—that's Katharine and me.'

'How old are you? I'm fifteen.'

'We're thirteen. I'm a month older than Katharine, and ever so much more sensible.'

Katharine laughed, but scorned to reply. 'I suppose you don't have anything to do with the hospital, Priscilla?'

'Not with the patients—not as a rule, that is. I have helped when they've been short-handed for some reason.'

'And you didn't catch anything? Winifred's dreadfully afraid we shall.'

'No, I didn't catch anything. I didn't think about it. I'm always very well, and there's no reason you should take things if you're well and don't worry about it. Nurses don't.'

'I suppose they don't. I've often wondered why they didn't.'

'Of course, I had to take care, and change my things, and disinfect as they do, and I kept away from everybody till it was certain I was all right. I didn't want to carry scarlet-fever to any of the village kiddies. But they can't understand that. They think because I live there I must breathe germs all the time, and carry diseases about and scatter them wherever I go. It's awfully silly, but you'd think I'd got the plague.'

'How soft!' Dorothy Ann scoffed. 'Then aren't they friendly?'

'Oh no, they won't speak to me. I suppose their mothers tell them not to. When I go into a shop they all get to the other side, and they pull the babies away when they see me coming.'

'How awfully beastly for you! I say, aren't you lonely?'

'How simply silly of them!' Dorothy Ann's tone was as indignant as Katharine's had been sympathetic. 'What awful duffers they must be!'

'It is silly, of course, but I never think about it now. I felt bad at first. I must get home now,' and Priscilla changed the subject abruptly. 'Mother needs my help at dinner-time. But there's no need for you to come for half-an-hour yet.'

'Oh, but we can't find our way! We're hopelessly lost!' and Katharine sat up in dismay.

'You really mustn't leave us to our fate like that!' Dorothy Ann added, still lying lazily on the heather, however. 'The search-parties would only find our mouldering bones, weeks afterwards, and then you'd have to have a funeral. You brought us here; you'd better stick to us, Priscilla.'

Priscilla laughed. 'If you go up to that gorse-bush on the edge of the hollow you'll see the hospital, and a straight path leading to it. It's one of mine; I've come here so often. I bring books and work, and sit among the Chickens when I feel like being alone. There's quite a trodden path by now; you can't possibly miss it. But if you don't turn up in an hour I'll come back and fetch you.'

'Shall we risk it, Dorothy Ann?'

'I think we might, Katharine.'

'You can't possibly get lost;' and Priscilla laughed, and left them lying on the heather, two green spots on the brown carpet.

'This—is—ripping!' murmured Dorothy Ann drowsily, five minutes later. 'Just hear the bees!'

'There's an earwig going down my neck, and some heather tickling. But I can't be bothered' — Katharine's voice died away; evidently she could not be bothered to finish her sentence.

'Isn't it jolly hot? There's no wind in here.' Dorothy Ann was growing drowsier.

'Don't bother. I want to—to think—about Priscilla' —

Dorothy chuckled sleepily, but felt disinclined to reply, and any further attempt at conversation was left to the bees.

An hour later Priscilla, alarmed by their long absence, came running up the path, and stood on the edge of the hollow and laughed. Then she went down to wake them. 'Our strong air seems to be taking effect.'

'Dan, you lazy beggar, you've been asleep!'

'I'm half an invalid still,' Dorothy Ann chuckled. 'I'm used to having naps. But what about you? You are a lazy kid!'

‘You’re very late for dinner,’ Priscilla warned them.

‘I believe I’m hungry again!’ Katharine’s voice was full of surprise. ‘Are you, Dan?’

‘Starving! Let’s hurry.—I say, Priscilla, don’t tell anybody, will you? There’s a dear!’

Priscilla laughed again, and promised faithfully to keep the secret. ‘It’s really a compliment to our good air!’ she said, brushing twigs of heather off one green tunic, and then off the other.

CHAPTER VI.

JOY-DAYS AND OTHERS.

'What was it you wanted us to do for you, Winifred?' Katharine asked over supper that night.

Winifred laughed. 'You've done it very nicely.'

They had talked about Priscilla to her ever since she came off duty. She had advised them not to go for another walk during the afternoon, but to take things easily for the first day; so, saying nothing about their morning nap, they had taken a book and gone to lie on the heather just outside the enclosure, on the understanding that Dorothy Ann would read aloud. In half-an-hour Katharine had tired of this, however, and had returned to the garden to help Priscilla, who was mowing the lawn. Dorothy would have helped too, but had been reminded of her heart; so she had consented to sit with a magazine, and read out jokes while the others worked. In the evening they had begged for another walk, and Priscilla had taken them to gather hyacinths in the woods and lanes.

'I wanted you to make friends with Priscilla and be company for her,' Winifred explained.

'Why didn't you tell us?' asked Katharine.

'We'd have done that anyway. We couldn't have helped it. She's awfully jolly,' said Dorothy Ann.

'I thought you would. But I couldn't ask you to. It wouldn't have been at all the same thing to her. She's very proud, and if she had thought I'd asked you to be friends for her sake you'd never have got hold of her at all.'

Katharine nodded. 'I've known girls like that at school. You have to get it into their heads somehow that you really want to be friends. If they think it's only because you feel you've got to, you never get on at all.'

'Oh, well, we've got on all right with Priscilla!' Dorothy Ann said lightly.

That was only the first of many 'joy-days,' as Katharine called them. Under Priscilla's guidance they explored moor and dale, attempting longer distances as Dorothy Ann grew stronger. Soon she was able for all-day excursions, when Priscilla's rucksac held sandwiches and biscuits, cakes and fruit, and they went to a farm for glasses of milk at midday.

She led them straight across the moor and down the hill towards the great lake at the head of the dale. Leaving the moor by a field-track, they found their way through woods, where were long banks of wild rhododendron in full flower and a carpet of hyacinths beneath, to the side of a stream and waterfall. Here they lunched, sitting on great boulders close to the tumbling beck, and scrambled about for a while on the rocks. Then Priscilla led them on by woodland paths down to the shore of the lake, and they walked out on to the great dam, and stood there bareheaded in the wind blowing down from the higher moors, fancying themselves far out at sea. Their homeward way lay through low-lying meadows beside the river, where every stile, as they crossed from one field to the next, gave change of colour. If one meadow was golden with buttercups, the next would be crimson with sorrel or white with hemlock, or occasionally, to their delight, splashed vivid purple-blue with meadow crane's-bill. Here Priscilla was as helpful as on the moor; she knew the flowers, and could satisfy their curiosity.

Another day they spent on the ridge where, nearly a thousand feet up, huge rocks in all kinds of weird shapes were gathered, scattered among heather and bracken, and clothed in bilberry and bearberry. They wandered from the Idol to the Monkey's Face, and many another, marvelling at their curious forms, and the strange markings upon them, and smooth round holes bored in their sides; but Priscilla had no knowledge of geology, and could not answer questions here. Lying flat in the wind on one of the biggest boulders, they looked out on the

one hand over the wide vale of York spread at their feet, and on the other up the long green dale to the lake at the head, while behind were velvet brown ridges of moor.

‘Your old Hen and Chickens is one of these, that has wandered away from the rest and got lost. Priscilla,’ said Dorothy Ann. ‘How did they get up here? That’s what I want to know.’

‘I’d like to know too. We’ll go up to the other side of the dale and see the Toad’s Mouth to-morrow.’

That was a big climb, and no one remembered Dorothy Ann’s heart till they had reached the top. Then it was not she but Katharine who stopped, with a wail of dismay.

‘Dorothy Ann! What about your heart? You aren’t supposed to go climbing!’

‘Then I guess it’s better,’ Dorothy Ann said stoutly, ‘for it hasn’t worried me.’

‘It must be,’ Priscilla laughed. ‘We’ve come down six hundred feet, and up nearly as much. I think you must be all right again, Dorothy Ann.’

‘I guess I am! We’ll say no more about it;’ and Dorothy Ann plunged on through the heather. ‘I want to see those two funny rocks we’ve looked at so often, standing up on the hill like pillars. I suppose they’re like those we saw yesterday, only thin and straight. What are they called? The Needles? Or Walking-Sticks?’



They lunched sitting close to the tumbling beck.

Priscilla laughed again. 'See when you get there,' she said; and, to their vast amazement, they found the 'rocks' not rocks at all, but masonry, the ruined pillars of some ancient house or

gateway, built of great squared blocks of stone, with the remains of arches springing from their sides, and holes for cross-beams.

‘Well, that’s funny!’ said Dorothy Ann. ‘What kind of house was it, Priscilla? It must have been huge!’

‘Nobody knows. I’ve never heard any story about it.’

‘Is it quite forgotten? How rummy!’

‘I think it’s rather sad;’ and Katharine could never look at the great ‘stoops’ without a feeling of desolation.

They ate their sandwiches, sitting in the wind sweeping down from the open moor behind, on what had once been the entrance-step of the mysterious ruin; then Priscilla led them along the cliff and down into the woods, where the undergrowth was one vast sea of blue wild hyacinths, to the lonely tarn hidden beneath the rocks. Here there was fine scrambling over boulders and by tiny paths among the bushes. Dorothy Ann was no longer an invalid as she climbed like a goat over the masses of fern-draped rock; the water-lily leaves covering parts of the silent pool, and the reflections of trees and cliffs in its dark water, fascinated Katharine.

They spent one Saturday afternoon in Harrogate, and had tea and ices at a café. Priscilla made no remark when this was arranged, but secretly wondered if the girls expected her to go in her old short skirt and coat, and, if so, whether they would not be ashamed to be seen with her. She came out from the cottage in her new blue dress, wearing the white coat and hat, and with her long plait tied with a white ribbon, and was greeted by Dorothy Ann with raised eyebrows and the brief remark, ‘Swank! Some dress!’

‘What a jolly frock, Priscilla!’ cried Katharine. ‘Why have you kept it dark all this time?’

‘Yes, why have you been sitting on it?’ Dorothy Ann demanded severely.

‘It sounds a queer way to treat a dress! I hope it doesn’t look so crushed as all that!’ Priscilla laughed.

‘You know I didn’t mean that. It looks awfully jolly, and some swank! But why haven’t we seen it before?’

‘Because it would be silly on the moor. Saturday afternoon in Harrogate is quite another thing.’ And they found it so, indeed, as they mingled with the crowds and thought with amusement of their lonely haunts, and the days when they did not meet a soul and the only sounds were the ‘tu-whitt’ of the plover’s cry and the humming of the bees in the heather.

One day, also, Priscilla led them up the steepest road she knew, till they had climbed a thousand feet above the river and bridge. At the highest point of the road they found the wayside banks covered with pansies, yellow and purple—not the little heart’s-ease of the fields, but real pansies which would not have disgraced any garden. Among the pansies was wild saxifrage, and Priscilla carried home small roots of both in her rucksac. ‘Matron will be pleased with them,’ she said.

In the meadows of a little hill the girls gathered handfuls of fragile pink water-avens, which were new to them both, and which Katharine persisted in calling anemones. From the hill-top they looked out over miles of moor unknown to them—south towards Ilkley, and north to Whernside and the mountains.

But the greatest ‘joy-day’ of all was when Winifred, being on night duty, ordered a wagonette from the nearest farm to be ready for them, and after sleeping all morning came out refreshed, and carried them all off across the hills and through the lanes to Fountains. That day lived in their memories for months. Priscilla had never been there before, though living so near; and none of them had ever seen such a park as Studley, with such magnificent yews and beeches and such herds of deer, or dreamed of such an enchanted spot as little Skelldale, with the great ruined abbey standing proudly between close-wooded cliffs. Dorothy Ann explored every corner and climbed every stair, reaching each possible and several apparently

impossible points; Priscilla asked endless questions, and wanted to know more even than the guide-book could tell; Katharine wandered about in a blissful dream through nave and aisles, transepts and chapels, her wide eyes seeing the white-robed, silent monks pacing the cloisters or chanting solemnly in the choir, or the crowd of pensioners at the gate. Winifred was equally fascinated by the surrounding buildings, the refectory and warming-room, the chapter-house with its three deep-set Norman doorways, and the cloister-court with its well and ancient cedar; while the vaulted cellarium amazed them all, and reduced even Dorothy Ann to awed silence.

Winifred's invitation included tea at the lodge beside the lake, where the island was one mass of wild purple rhododendrons, and the chaffinches came to sit on the stone balustrade and wait for their share of the cakes. As the party drove home in the early evening Katharine sighed happily.

'This has been the most glorious day yet! It ought to have been somebody's birthday! Are you sure it isn't yours, Priscilla?'

'Mine's in December. It's rather late, isn't it?'

Winifred laughed, and showed no surprise when a telegram awaiting them at the hospital told that their 'joy-day' had been a birthday party, after all. A baby-son had arrived for the married sister who was staying with their parents, and whose presence at home had made Katharine's return from school undesirable. He was a first baby and the first grandchild, and Katharine's excitement over her promotion to the dignity of aunthood was intense. This was the aspect of the affair which struck her as most satisfactory, and she felt several years older, and much older than Dorothy Ann, whenever she remembered she was an aunt. She would have liked to start for home at once, but realised that with nurses and babies about there would not be much room to spare; so she consented, though very reluctantly, to wait for a month or so before seeing her nephew.

These were great days for Priscilla. She was learning as much from the younger girls as they were from her. The books at which she had been working lay untouched on their shelves this summer; but she worked steadily during evenings or early mornings at the garden, feeling herself in honour bound to keep it in good condition, so that Matron should not have cause to feel ashamed of it, and to say that her gardener had failed her. Katharine and Dorothy helped her in her work, and from morning till night they were together. The two and a half years which separated her from them in age were forgotten, and they were the best of friends.

Priscilla soon knew all about their school-life. As they tramped over the heather, or sat crouching among the Chicken rocks below the big Hen while a sudden rainstorm swept across the moor, or lay out on the rocks in the sunshine and searched for ripening bilberries, Katharine gave vivid imaginative little descriptions of the girls and mistresses, till Priscilla felt she knew them all. There was Mademoiselle, who was a general favourite, in spite of her leanings towards needlework and her uncomfortable habit of 'getting you in a corner alone and talking French at you;' and Miss Bingham, who taught mathematics, but also superintended drill and games and was a 'good sport,' and was always referred to by both the girls as Binks or Binky; and Miss Graveson, the music-mistress, who was young and enthusiastic, and much liked; and Miss Chinch herself.

'We call her Chin-Chin-Chinaman, and Winifred jumps on us for it. But I'm positive certain she did it herself when she was at school.'

'We asked her if she did, and she went red and couldn't say no,' Dorothy Ann added.

Among the girls there were Van Evans and Menie Macdonald, who were such great friends though so very unlike in character. 'Like us,' put in Dorothy Ann. Van and Menie would be seniors next year, when the present Sixth had left, and they would make the school very jolly, for Van was up to anything, but Menie never let her 'go too far and make a silly of

herself,' said Katharine. And there was Phyllis, who was in the Third with Katharine and Dorothy, and who always knew everything, because her mother was a friend of Miss Chinchin's, and Phyllis always 'got to know things somehow.'

Dorothy Ann's revelations were on different lines. From her Priscilla heard of the big cricket-field, a short distance from the school, and the matches played there during the summer. There were four tennis-courts at one end, too, and space at the other end for basketball, and the whole school went there nearly every afternoon, except when they went to the baths for swimming. The captain of the cricket-club was leaving at Christmas, and Dorothy Ann, realising that there would be no cricket for her this summer, would have given much to know who would be chosen next year. If Van would consent it would be all right, but she was much more keen on tennis.

'If some of the others were here,' she said when she heard Katharine describing one after another of their companions, 'they'd tell you that Katharine's the girl with a grievance. That's what the seniors call her.'

'Really?' Priscilla looked doubtfully at Katharine, who laughed. 'She doesn't look like it.'

'She has one, all the same. All her sisters were at our school, you know.'

'All of them! There were only three before me,' Katharine interrupted indignantly. 'You make it sound as if there had been a dozen!—Joan and Margaret and Winifred all went to Miss Chinchin's, Priscilla, and no one can forget them. Joan—she's the one that's got the baby now—was awfully pretty, and Margaret and Winifred were very clever.'

'Winifred's pretty too. I don't know the other one,' Dorothy Ann put in.

'Awfully pretty,' Priscilla nodded.

'They were all three pretty, and all clever,' Katharine agreed; 'and, of course, Miss Chinchin can't forget them. Joan got married; Margaret's at college and doing awfully well, winning scholarships and all that kind of thing; and Winifred could have done the same if she hadn't been so keen on nursing. And the trouble is that everybody expects me to be like them, and I'm not. I'm not pretty, and' —

'No,' said Dorothy Ann promptly.

Katharine threw a lump of moss, which hit her in the eye, and went on: 'And I'm not clever. I can pass the usual sort of things that everybody has to pass, but nothing out of the ordinary. I could never come out first in anything, so I could never win a scholarship. I'm not brilliant in any single way.'

'No,' said Dorothy Ann again, and put up her hands to stop the next missile.

'And they think I ought to be. So they look at me in a grieved kind of way, and say, "And you are Margaret Mayne's sister!" or, "Joan would have done that easily!" or, "You are not like your elder sisters, my dear Katharine." That's Miss Chinchin. And I don't think it's fair. I can't do anything really well, and I'm never higher than sixth in the form.'

'There are fifteen of us, so it's not so bad.' Dorothy Ann changed her tone suddenly, and became sympathetic.

'It would be good enough for any one else. But they expect me to live up to my family, and it's not fair. I've told them all I'm the end, and the brains and good looks were used up before they got to me, but nobody can see it. I often wish the other girls had been dunces or a little less pretty.'

'So that's why she's the girl with a grievance. She's always having her family held up to her as an example. I shouldn't like it myself,' Dorothy Ann acknowledged.

It was during one of their moorland rambles that Priscilla first mentioned her father. The girls had seen him at times wandering aimlessly about the garden or on the moor within sight of the hospital, answering gently when spoken to, never venturing a word on his own account. They knew he had been told they were friends of Priscilla's, but doubted if he knew them

again next time he saw them. He never seemed to go far from home, and they had never once met him on the higher moor behind the hospital. A little river ran down through the moor close by the houses, forming deep pools here and there; and he sat by it for hours at a time, rod in hand, sometimes catching a few small fish, but more often satisfied just to sit there, listening to, and looking at, the water.

Priscilla, like her mother, was very gentle and patient with him, though she never talked about him. But one day, when they had scrambled to the top of the big Mother Hen, and were lying there in the sun and wind, Katharine examining the frayed hem of her green tunic, and remarking complacently that now she would *have* to have a new one next term, Priscilla broke a long silence with a sudden deeply thoughtful remark.

‘Do you know, I often think it may have been up on to these moors father came that time before he was taken so ill.’

Katharine raised her head quickly and stared at her. Dorothy Ann rolled over on the rock and did the same.

‘When all the money was stolen from him, d’you mean?’

‘It wasn’t stolen; I’m certain of that. He didn’t say much to us when he came home, but the one thing he did say was that the money was safe; he had “put it away safely,” and it would be all right now. And he meant it; he knew what he was saying.’

‘Where do you think he’d put it, then?’

‘Where could he put it on the moor, Priscilla?’

‘I think he’d buried it. It’s the only thing he could do with it up here.’

‘I say, suppose you could find it?’ cried Dorothy Ann.

‘Or suppose he woke up sometime and told you where to look?’

‘That would be better, of course,’ Dorothy Ann agreed.—‘Do you think he ever will, Priscilla?’

‘We hoped he would at first. That’s partly why we came here. Mother thought he might get stronger in this air; it had always done him good before.’

‘But why do you think it was these moors?’ asked Katharine. ‘There are moors everywhere—miles of them.’

‘Yes, you could never search for a buried treasure unless you had some clue to start with;’ and Dorothy Ann, who had sat up with the lust of a treasure-hunt in her eyes, subsided again. ‘Why should it be these moors, Priscilla? It might just as well be over there where the pansies grew, or away up beyond the reservoir.’

‘Because he’d been here before; it was a favourite part of his. If he had got a queer idea into his head about burying the money, he’d be more likely to choose a place he knew. I think he’d known it for years, for when I was very tiny he used to tell me stories about the moor, and I remember bits of them, and they seem to fit this part. There was one about a big stone and a lot of little ones, and I’ve often wondered if it was this very rock he was thinking of. And I’ve sometimes thought that if I could get him to go all over the moor with me we might happen to pass the very place where he hid the money, and he might remember. The sight of it might remind him. What do you think?’

‘I think it’s jolly likely!’ Dorothy Ann cried eagerly. ‘Why don’t you try?’

‘But suppose it made him bad again—the excitement, and all that, you know?’ Katharine said doubtfully.

‘Yes, I thought of that. I think it might be risky. He might be a lot worse than he is. And we can get on all right without the money.’

‘If you had it, you could go to school again, and you know you’d like that,’ remarked Dorothy. ‘You were saying only yesterday you wished you could go back with us and have good times too.’

'But she doesn't want it if getting it would make her father worse!' Katharine said swiftly.

'No. If there's any risk at all we'd rather go on as we are,' Priscilla said gravely.

'But suppose the excitement—if it happened, you know—made him better, woke him up, and all that?' Dorothy Ann insisted. 'You have to risk things sometimes.'

'This would be a big kind of thing to risk. And he wouldn't come, anyway. He gets tired when he has walked a very little way from the gate, and he seems to have a queer nervous feeling about not liking to lose sight of the house. I think he's afraid he'd never find it again. It's natural, after all. He knows he'd have to be shown the way back, and if he lost the person he went out with he'd never find the house again if he couldn't see it. So he never goes farther than the beck; I don't believe he has ever been up here as far as these rocks, although they're so near. They're out of sight, you see. So I don't suppose I could get him to come over the moor, even if it would be wise to try. But I've wondered sometimes if he'd remember the place if he saw it.'

'Well, if he ever does, you'll write and tell us all about it, won't you?'

'You'll forget all about us when you get back to school; there's so much going on.'

'We won't forget. How could we, after all the jolly times we've had together?' Katharine said reproachfully.

'We're not so mean as all that. Of course you must write to us, and we'll write and tell you all our news,' Dorothy Ann said indignantly.

'I sha'n't have much news to tell. When you go we shall settle down again, and nothing more will happen for five years or so.'

'It might; you don't know. In five years you'll be twenty, and you can't go on like this for ever.'

'I shall be a nurse. Matron will have me, I know. I'll have to wait, of course, but I'll be getting experience here.'

'And, anyway, we've had some awfully jolly times this summer. Think of all our joy-days! You can always remember those, you know,' Katharine said consolingly.

'I'd rather have jolly times to look forward to than feel they 're all behind me,' was Priscilla's not unnatural remark, and the thought often returned to her as their visit drew to a close.

The girls were sorry to go, but both were looking forward eagerly to the next stage in their holidays. Dorothy Ann was to go with her parents and younger brothers to the sea on the east coast. Katharine was longing to see her mother and the baby nephew. Priscilla felt very desolate as they talked of these plans and of their meeting next term; but she did not show it.

As she stood in the heather waving her farewells as they drove off to the station, she could not help wondering if all that had been pleasant enough before would still satisfy her, or if things would not seem very flat and empty now; and she was right. In one sense she was poorer than before their visit, for now she had lost something. Then she had been contented; now she missed them at every turn. Then she had not known she was lonely; now she knew it all too well. Gardening, studying, long walks on errands for the hospital, even Nurse Mayne's company, were no longer enough; the last she almost dreaded, because at times Winifred reminded her so keenly of Katharine. Up on the moor, among the rocks, down in the dale and woods, or away by the lake, every favourite spot was filled with memories of their days together; more than once Priscilla found the 'joy-days' hard to look back upon, and almost wished they had not been.

CHAPTER VII.

ROUND A CAMP FIRE.

A fortnight before Christmas Katharine went flying from class-room to music-room, from cubicle to study, in search of Dorothy Ann. She found her at last, and dragged her into a corner. 'Dan, I've a letter from Winifred. She wants us to go and stop with her for a week in the holidays. Do you think your folks would spare you? She knows January is a funny time to go to the moors, and the hospital's a funny place to ask us to, but she does want us to come awfully. It's because of Priscilla. Winifred says she's been so frightfully lonely all the autumn, and missing us so dreadfully; and there's a note from Priscilla herself just begging us to come. Winifred's asked mother, and she says I may go, if I like, for a week after Christmas. Will you? And would your mother let you? And could you travel alone?'

'I could, of course,' Dorothy Ann said indignantly; 'but they'd never believe it. You know what people are.'

Katharine had noticed the unreasonableness of 'people' herself. 'They can't help it. They're always like that. Well, who could come with you? Or could you come home with me? No; then you'd miss Christmas.'

'I couldn't miss Christmas. But father sometimes goes to Leeds on business' —

'Goody! Then make him go after the New Year, and we'll come back to school together. Bring lots of warm things; it will be jolly cold on the moor. Here's Priscilla's letter; you'll see how much she wants us.'

Dorothy Ann read Priscilla's pleading note, and its effect was such that she wrote to her mother at once, begging to be allowed to go north, if only for a few days. 'She wants us awfully, mother! It's horribly lonely for her, and you know how good she was to us in the summer! You said then you were sorry for her, because she must be so lonely. She says it's been heaps worse since then, because she keeps missing us all the time. Katharine's going, anyway; so do let me go too!'

She pleaded eagerly and insistently, with the result that one afternoon in mid-January she met Katharine and Winifred at Harrogate, and they took the train for the moors.

'Isn't it funny to arrive in the dark? It's not six o'clock yet. Think of the sunshine when we came in June!'

'You'll find several things very different from what they were in June,' Winifred remarked. 'But the moor is much the same.'

'We won't see Priscilla sitting in the heather this time. I say, *isn't* it dark?' Dorothy Ann commented when they had left the main road and were driving up the lonely way to the hospital. 'Now I know why you have all those whitewashed stones here and there!'

'Much need. We've no gas-lamps here. Even Priscilla has to do her errands in daylight.'

Priscilla met them at the door, her face radiant. She carried in their rugs and parcels, but at first refused to come herself. 'You want your tea. I'll come in later.'

'What nonsense! We want you more than tea. Come and talk to us while we have it.'

'Tell us all your news, and we'll tell you ours,' said Katharine.

So Priscilla sat on the window-sill and listened, protesting that she had no news to tell. They talked breathlessly, yet managed to make a very good tea, and by the time they had finished she was fairly up to date in all their school news. 'How are your eyes?' she asked of Katharine.

'Oh, heaps better! They say it was partly because I was run down, and the moor pulled me up again just in time last summer. Anyway, they don't worry me much. Of course, they're very bad *sometimes*.'

‘When she wants to get out of needlework or practising!’

It was nearly bed-time when tea-supper was over. Priscilla stayed chatting for an hour, and then said good-night, promising to come first thing in the morning to take them to see how the moor looked in winter.

As Katharine brushed her curls in preparation for bed she said decidedly, ‘Priscilla’s got something to say, Dan, but she’s waiting till she gets us alone. Didn’t you see it in her eyes?’

Dorothy Ann looked up quickly from her long brown plait. ‘No, I didn’t notice anything. She said she hadn’t any news.’

‘I know; but she has. You’ll see to-morrow.’

‘You are weird, the way you notice things, Katharine.’

‘Well, aren’t I always right?’

‘Gen’rally, ‘cept in grammar.’

‘Oh, grammar!’ Katharine laughed with infinite scorn, and began to plait her hair.

As they climbed the moor-path next morning, Dorothy Ann turned to Priscilla with the boyish directness of manner which characterised her. ‘Katharine says you’ve something to tell us. She says she saw it in your eyes last night. Have you? Or is it only her imagination? She’s got a big one, I know.’

Priscilla glanced at Katharine. ‘I didn’t know I showed it. I tried not to. There is something. I’ve been longing for you to come; I wanted to tell you about it. Wait till we get to the Hen and Chickens; I’ll tell you there.’

They looked at her curiously, even Dorothy conscious of the suppressed excitement in her tone. ‘Is it about your father?’

Priscilla nodded, and walked on in silence; and they hurried beside her, too eager to have thoughts even for the moor. It was very much as it had been in June, for the season was mild, and there had been no snow as yet. There were no flowers on the gorse-bushes, no young shoots of bracken, no pink leaves on the bilberry plants, no golden stars of tormentil or blue sprays of milkwort. But the rolling open brown moor was the same, with tawny masses of dead bracken everywhere; the wind was as fresh and sweet, though colder. There was less change up here than down in the dale with its naked woods.

‘Let’s get in among the Chickens,’ said Priscilla abruptly, as they reached the edge of the cup which held the great rock. ‘I think there’ll be showers. We get a lot of rain in winter.’

They crept into the biggest cavern, which would just hold them all comfortably, with about two feet to spare at the inner end. A shallow hole was scooped in the sand, and a heap of dry wood lay near it.

Priscilla produced paper and matches from her rucksack, and laid and lighted a small fire. ‘The smoke goes out by that crack. I generally have a fire for company. Sometimes I bring my dinner and cook it, and stop here all day and work. There’s so little daylight at present. I’ve been swotting at those books you said your girls were using; I ordered them in Harrogate. I had to do something, and do it hard, because things felt so flat when you went away. I’ve been awfully lonely.’

‘I’m sure it was horrid at first,’ Katharine said sympathetically.

‘I kept seeing you two everywhere. Sometimes I wished there was some place we hadn’t gone together, so that I could go there without thinking of you.’

‘We’re like the three witches in *Macbeth*,’ said Dorothy Ann, as they sat round the camp fire. ‘Some day I’d like to cook my dinner here, Priscilla. But now tell us about your father.’ Her eyes were as much excited as Priscilla’s own, which were very bright and eager in spite of her quiet tone.

‘I haven’t even told mother yet,’ said Priscilla. ‘I don’t want her to be disappointed if nothing comes of it. But he’s different lately. Well, I’ll begin at the beginning. After you left I

tried to coax him to come for walks with me; but nothing came of it for a long time. Then he had influenza; we all had. One of the nurses went for a holiday, and brought it back with her, and we all had it in turn. I think influenza should be treated as infectious, and patients sent to isolation hospitals.'

'Yes, it is awfully catching. Well, Priscilla?'

'I wasn't bad, I suppose because I'm always out so much. Mother and father were worse, and had to have a doctor. And the tonics father had to take had a tremendous effect on him; when he got better he seemed far stronger than he'd been before. That was in November, and we had jolly weather, sunny and pleasant; so I tried again to get him to go for walks. And by degrees he began to go with me. At first he wouldn't go far, but he seemed to have forgotten his fear of losing sight of the hospital, so long as he was holding on to my arm. He kept asking if I was sure I knew the way; but after a while he saw that I did, and then he seemed to feel better about it. Gradually I got him to go up on the moor, and he liked it; and sometimes we went quite a long way down the road. Mother was awfully glad about it; but she didn't know all I was planning to do. I never brought him here, to these rocks; we used often to pass quite close, but the moor rises so much all round that you don't see them till you've climbed up to the edge of the hollow, and I never proposed that' —

'But why not?' Dorothy Ann cried, amazed and impatient. 'I thought you thought he'd remember them?'

'She wanted to get him used to it first, silly,' Katharine said swiftly. 'She was afraid it might be too much for him all at once.'

'Oh, I see! I didn't think of that. Sorry!' and Dorothy Ann subsided.

'Yesterday I decided to risk it;' and Priscilla leaned forward, the subdued fire in her dark eyes blazing up suddenly. They unconsciously leaned forward also, tense with eagerness and excitement. 'I wanted to know before you came whether anything would happen. So I brought him up to the edge, very slowly, and didn't say anything. But *he* did!'

She stopped and drew a long breath. An exclamation broke from the other two. 'What did he say? Priscilla, go on!'

'He just said, "The Hen and Chickens!" and stared in a queer way, frowning as if he was trying to remember. I'd never mentioned their name.'

'Then he remembered! And it didn't do him any harm?'

'And he didn't say any more?'

'He stared at me as if he hardly saw me—as if I wasn't there and he was looking right through me—and then he said a queer thing. He said, "Four—to the right; four—to the left!" and then he sat down on that rock up there, and put his head on his hands as if he was trying to think.'

Priscilla leaned back against the rock and gazed at them. Katharine was white and anxious, Dorothy breathing quickly in excitement.

'What did you do? What do you think he meant? What could he mean, Priscilla?'

'But did it hurt him, Priscilla? Did it make him worse again?' Katharine cried sharply.

'I didn't know what he meant, and just then I didn't care. I was terrified that I'd hurt him, and felt that I shouldn't have done it. I tell you I was shaking all over. I only really remembered afterwards what he'd said. I put my arms round him and asked him to come home, and he got up with a big sigh and said, "I told you, child?" I said, "Yes, yes, father dear;" and he said, "*You* won't forget?" as if he knew he would. I wanted to cry; but I promised him I wouldn't forget, and begged him to come home, and he came with me quite quietly, just as he always does. And—and *I don't believe he's any the worse for it!*'

'Oh, I am glad!' Katharine drew a long breath of relief. 'Oh, Priscilla dear, don't! Don't do that!' and she threw herself upon the elder girl and hugged her, as Priscilla covered her face

with her hands.

'Well, if he's none the worse, I'm sure there's no need to cry about it!' Dorothy Ann's practical temperament could see no reason for this sudden breakdown.

'No, there's no need. I'm an idiot, and I won't cry. But when I'd got him safely home I went out on the heather and' — —

'Just howled,' said Katharine, with understanding. 'I know. I'd have done it too. It was because you'd been so frightened. But tell us, Priscilla! Is he just the same as ever?'

Priscilla's hand crept out and gripped hers. Katharine's complete understanding was very comforting.

'He seems just the same; but several times he's said to me, "You won't forget?" I think he knows he's told me something, and thinks it was something important. He can't remember what it was, but he's trusting that I shall. Of course, I always tell him I'll remember, and when mother asks what he means I say it was something he saw up on the moor. She thinks he must be better since he's evidently thinking about it. I didn't think I ought to say anything to her until we knew if there was really anything to tell. If you two hadn't been coming to-day I think I'd have told Matron; but as we'd talked about it I thought I'd tell you first.'

'It was awfully jolly of you! But what *do* you think he meant, Priscilla? It sounds' — Dorothy Ann laughed in spite of her eagerness — 'it sounds like an order at gym.! "Up the middle in eights! Four to the right, four to the left!" Can't you just hear Binky, Katharine?'

Priscilla looked at Katharine. 'I've been thinking — if it *had* anything to do with the money, and if we could find it, we might be able to find some doctor who could cure him. This shows that his brain is all right; it isn't gone — it's only asleep. We thought perhaps he couldn't wake up; that something had gone wrong in that dreadful illness, and he would never be any different. But if it's only asleep, perhaps he could be wakened up, if he could see the right kind of doctor.'

Katharine nodded. 'Oh, I do hope so! Wouldn't it be nice to have him all right again?'

'Nice?' said Priscilla, and gazed into the little fire with blazing eyes.

'But how are you going to get the money, Priscilla?' Dorothy Ann insisted. 'What do you think he meant? Have you thought about it? Have you begun to hunt, or did you wait for us?'

'If he really hid the money up here, he must have buried it. There's nothing else he could do,' Priscilla argued, gazing thoughtfully across at them. 'So we'll have to dig. I brought my garden spades; I waited for you, of course' — —

'You darling! We'll love to help!' exclaimed Katharine.

'We'll have a regular treasure-hunt!' Dorothy Ann's eyes sparkled. 'But where shall we start, Priscilla? Oh, what *do* you think he meant?'

'I've been thinking about it ever since. I thought, perhaps if there were four Chicken rocks on each side' — —

But Dorothy Ann was already outside and counting. 'Five on that side and six on this. You'd count from the head of the Hen, of course. D'you think he divided it, and put half under the fourth on each side, in case one lot was found and stolen?'

'That's what I thought he might have meant,' Priscilla acknowledged.

Dorothy seized a spade and began to dig vigorously.

Katharine caught up the second spade, and ran to the other side of the great rock; then returned hastily and handed the spade to Priscilla. 'You'd like to. You ought to find it, not one of us. I'll watch.'

'I say, I didn't think of that;' and Dorothy Ann paused. 'Take mine, Priscilla! I only meant to help you.'

'No, no, please go on! I can't use both spades,' Priscilla laughed nervously. 'It's awfully jolly of Katharine to think of it.' She took the spade, and began to dig also.

Dorothy Ann laughed ruefully. 'Miss Mayne says it's Katharine's imagination makes her do jolly things, like that. 'Fraid I haven't any! But I do want to dig up that treasure! We'll take turns, Katharine. You have a go now.'

Presently Katharine stopped digging, with a wail. 'I've got to rock! I can't go any deeper.'

'So have I.' Priscilla frowned. 'It's all rock here, with just a layer of sand. What shall we do?'

'We can't get through rock. And he couldn't,' Dorothy Ann argued. 'It can't be here, after all. He must have meant something else.'

'What could he mean?' They stood and looked at one another.

'We can't dig up the whole moor on the chance of finding something!'

'Now, Katharine, trot out that imagination, if it's any good!' Dorothy Ann mocked. 'What did he mean?'

'I say!' said Katharine softly, and looked up to the edge of the hollow, where the path from the hospital reached the crest of the wave of moor.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRISCILLA'S BURIED TREASURE.

Priscilla's father stood there. His awakening brain, stirred by the freshness of the early morning into some dim memory of the day before, had led him along the path again. He stood looking down at them, something in his face which they had never seen there before—a vague trouble, as if something were distressing, almost angering, him. Then he came quickly towards them.

The younger girls shrank a little, for the displeasure in his face was growing. Suppose he had remembered the money, and was angry that they should search for it? He might only half-understand. The spade and the holes in the sand made their intentions evident. They knew he was not responsible for his actions, and there was a touch of fear in their faces, but they stood their ground bravely and waited for him.

There was fear in Priscilla's face too, but it was fear for, not of, him as she went to meet him and laid her hand on his arm. 'What's the matter, father dear? Did you want me?'

'Send them away! What are they doing here?' and he looked nervously at Katharine and Dorothy Ann. 'They must go away, Priscilla. They shouldn't be here.'

'You'd better go home, girls,' she said clearly.—'We weren't doing any harm, father—just playing among the rocks.' And then in a hurried whisper to Katharine, 'Hide in the heather up there and watch. Don't go right away; we might need you.'

They needed no further hint; the one thing they dreaded was to be sent away from the excitement altogether. They disappeared over the crest of the moor, then dropped flat and crawled back at a different point, and lay concealed among rocks and heather to watch.

Priscilla's hand still lay on her father's arm. He seemed troubled, and she was trying to quiet him.

'Do you want me to dig, father? Where? Where shall I dig?'

He looked at her vaguely, and the girls lying in the heather held their breath. Would he remember any more?

Then Katharine's hand gripped Dorothy's so tightly that it ought to have hurt her, but Dorothy Ann did not feel it. While Priscilla stood watching, her face white, her father went deliberately to the head of the big Hen and carefully took four paces to the right.

Priscilla gave a little gasp. Dorothy Ann whispered excitedly, 'Four *paces*! We never thought of that!' Katharine did not speak, but watched, fascinated and breathless.

He marked the spot he had reached with his stick, then turned to the left, and as carefully took four paces at right angles. This brought him to a low rock, in no way unlike any of the others scattered about the hollow. No one searching for a hiding-place would have suspected it more than any of the rest.

He looked at Priscilla. 'Here!' he said, and watched her with a strange look as she caught up a spade and began to dig as well as she could with her shaking hands.

Up in the heather the two girls looked at one another. 'Why did he put it there?' murmured Dorothy Ann. 'Why not under the big one?'

'Because, if anybody heard it was here, that big rock was just the kind of place they'd search under. It's the only one on the moor. But there's nothing to mark out that little one from all the rest. He only used the big one as a guide to the real secret place,' Katharine explained swiftly. 'It was awfully clever.'

Dorothy Ann nodded. It was simple enough, as so many things were, when explained by Katharine. They both watched and stared as Priscilla paused in her digging. Had she come to rock again? Was it all a mistake?

She looked anxiously at her father. 'Father dear, you're tired. Won't you come home? I'll come back and dig. I won't forget the place.'

'No, no! Dig! Go on, Priscilla! Will they come back?' and he looked round nervously.

'No, they won't come back;' and she dug on, very nervous as to the result if she should really find anything.

'Under the rock; you must dig in now,' the directions came jerkily.

She nodded, and worked on. Her spade struck something hard, with the harsh sound of metal. She knew it was not rock this time. She was trembling as he dropped the spade and took up a trowel to clear away the sand. Then very carefully she drew out an iron box, and looked up fearfully at her father.

His face was working strangely. 'Take it—to Priscilla.' He stumbled over the words, and she knew he meant her mother. Then his overstrained brain gave way; he fell in a heap beside the rock, and lay there quietly.

Priscilla dropped the box, whose rusty clasp broke and showed its contents as a bundle wrapped in a mackintosh cover. Some such collapse as this she had dreaded, and that was why she had asked the girls to wait. Tears were running down her face, but she paid no heed to them as she shouted frantically, 'Go for help! Fetch somebody quickly! Oh, Katharine, you come here!'

Dorothy Ann turned and ran down the path to the hospital as she had never run even in the sports at school. Bursting in at the gates, she went straight to the Matron's house, and, finding no one there, was running, heedless of infection, towards the wards, when she very fortunately ran into a man who was digging up the garden-beds.

'Hello, lass! wheer be ye coomin' to?'

'Oh!' she gasped; 'it's Mr Scarsby—on the moor—he's been taken ill. Priscilla sent me. You must come and fetch him. He can't walk—bring somebody else to help'—

'Eh, Ah'll coom! Is he took bad, then, t'owd gentleman?' and he ran to find the coachman who drove the ambulance. They brought a stretcher and set out, Dorothy Ann stumbling in front, quite breathless by this time, to show the way.

Katharine had run to Priscilla's side. 'What is it, Priscilla? Can we do anything? What's the matter with him?'

'It's the shock.' Priscilla dashed her tears away. 'I was afraid of it. I tried to get him to go home, but it was no use. Bring some water, and I'll bathe his face. I don't know what else to do. Oh, I wish I hadn't done it! I ought never to have brought him here. I know mother will say so.'

'But you couldn't know it would hurt him! And you've found the money. You can have all kinds of doctors for him now.' Katharine would dearly have liked to see inside the mysterious bundle, but knew better than to suggest it just now.

'What's the good of money and doctors if I've killed him?' Priscilla sat down and covered her face with her hands.

Katharine shook her gently. 'You mustn't, Priscilla. Don't do it! They'll be here in a few minutes, and then we'll get him to bed and have the doctor, and perhaps he'll be all right when he wakes up again. It was awfully exciting for him to see the thing he'd hidden years ago and forgotten all about. Of course it was too much for him. I'll fetch water; you must bathe his head.'

She roused Priscilla to action, and kept her busy till Dorothy Ann appeared, followed by the stretcher-bearers. With many rough exclamations of sympathy, they raised him gently and carried him away, Priscilla nervously trying to help, Dorothy Ann panting from her run.

Katharine sat looking on, but not offering to lend a hand, and as the procession went up the path Dorothy Ann turned to her incredulously. 'Why don't you do something to help?'

Aren't you coming?"

'Come here!' said Katharine; and then, in a loud whisper which could not reach the retreating men. '*I'm sitting on the box!*'

'Oh, I see! Yes, of course, we couldn't leave it there.'

'No. You go with them, and when you get a chance ask Priscilla what she wants done with it. Ask her if you and I shall bring it home for her.'

'Don't you mind stopping?'

'No; but tell me how he is when you come back. And don't be long.'

Dorothy Ann nodded, and ran after Priscilla and the men; and Katharine carefully arranged her skirt so that the box was altogether hidden, and sat, elbows on knees and chin in hands, to await further instructions.

Before very long Dorothy Ann came running back, and threw herself down on the sand. 'I asked Priscilla. She said, if we didn't mind, would we keep guard over it for a while? She'll come back as soon as she can. She doesn't want her mother to see the box till she's sure there's something in it. It might not be the money, and then it would be such a frightful disappointment if she'd told every one she'd found it.'

'She's awfully anxious not to upset her mother more than she can help. Then I think we should fill up that hole again, and carry the box in among the Chickens. It's going to rain, and we can't sit out here.'

'All right. I'll fill it up;' and Dorothy Ann seized the spade.

'Make quite sure there's nothing else in the hole first.'

'I never thought of that, idiot that I am!' Dorothy Ann went, down on her hands and knees, and made a thorough examination with hands and trowel. 'No, there's nothing more. Shall I fill it up now, Katharine? Some one might come along, and they'd think it was so funny.'

'Wouldn't it be better to leave it for Priscilla?' Katharine had reconsidered the matter. 'She might like to look for herself. No one's likely to come; no one ever does. There's the first drop. Let's get inside.'

They carried the box into their cavern, and Katharine sat on it again, while Dorothy Ann revived the dying camp fire, and tended it carefully till she had a cheerful little blaze. The rain began to fall heavily, but they were dry and warm as they sat talking over the strange morning and its possible results.

'I wonder if there's really much money in the box,' Katharine mused. 'Winifred thought he'd saved up a good deal. Isn't it funny to think I may be sitting on a fortune? It's jolly hard! I wish I had a cushion!'

'Have my coat!'

'No; you'll need it. But our caps would help;' and Katharine spread their knitted caps on the box and sat on them. 'That's better!'

'I wonder what they'll do—when he's better, of course. I should think they'd go away from here; wouldn't you?'

'Sure to. And they'll send Priscilla back to school. Wouldn't it be jolly if she could come with us?'

'Ripping! But do you think they will? She's sixteen.'

'She could go for two years. She left when she was thirteen. I think they'll send her.'

'Would she like it? I wonder how she'd get on?'

'She's often said she'd like to go back. She'd be in the Sixth, I suppose. Or perhaps not; the Fifth would be more likely. She must be a bit behind. Not so very much, perhaps, for she has been working, and Winifred has been helping her all autumn. That will make a lot of difference.'

'Still, it's not the same as being at school. She'd have a good deal to catch up at first. Wouldn't it be queer if she did go back with us? We'd seem only kids to her, once we got to school and there were others for her to make friends with.'

'It wouldn't make any difference that way, I'm sure. But, of course, she'd make other friends in her own set. At least, I suppose she would;' and Katharine lapsed into thoughtful silence as she gazed into the fire, which Dorothy Ann was feeding with dried twigs of heather.

'I hope she won't forget us! If she doesn't come by dinner-time I shall feel like Casabianca. We'll have to go home for dinner in turns.'

'She won't forget us,' Katharine said confidently; and her trust was justified when Priscilla came striding along through the rain soon after twelve o'clock, wearing a mackintosh and a sou'-wester hat with a long flap covering her neck at the back, her hair tucked inside, her rucksac on her shoulders.

'I say, you look ready to go ten miles in rain!' Dorothy Ann said admiringly.

'I often do. I have to be ready for it;' and Priscilla unslung the rucksac and laid it down carefully.

Katharine had sprung up joyfully. 'I've taken care of it for you. I've been sitting on it all the time. How is he, Priscilla?'

'Mother's got him into bed and sent for the doctor. He's just the same,' Priscilla said very gravely. 'Matron says we can't possibly tell how it will affect him till he wakes up. I told her all about it, so that she could explain to the doctor. I thought some one ought to know.'

'Not your mother?'

'I want to know what's in that box before I confess to mother. If it's all been for nothing I think it will about kill me. But you'll be getting hungry. I thought we might have our dinner here and go home later, so I brought some eggs' —

'Priscilla! What does dinner matter? We want to know as much as you do!'

'Oh, Priscilla, aren't you going to open that box?' wailed Dorothy Ann. 'I can't wait another minute! We're just aching to know what's in it!'

Priscilla looked from one to the other. 'Don't you mind? I thought you'd be starving.'

'We're starving to know if you've found the buried treasure!'

'Oh, well, then we needn't wait!' Priscilla had been curbing her own impatience with difficulty.

Kneeling by the box, she raised the lid and began to undo the wrappings, and Katharine and Dorothy Ann pressed nearer, kneeling also. The leaping flame gave them light, and danced in their tense, eager faces. They were so silent with excitement that they could hear the pattering of the rain on the sand outside. Dorothy Ann was breathing quickly, Katharine hardly at all.

Priscilla's hands shook as she drew out a thick leather case and unbuckled the straps. It had several pockets, and all were full of papers. She drew out the slips, then looked up at the girls. They were Bank of England notes for ten and twenty pounds.

'I—say!' whispered Dorothy Ann. 'Five of those will make a hundred pounds! Count them quickly, Priscilla!'

'She'll be a millionaire,' murmured Katharine, and at that Priscilla woke out of her dazed dream and laughed.

'No fear of that! There are no millionaires in our family. But there are some hundreds of pounds here. I must take all this to mother at once. She ought to know. No, we won't count it. She must do that;' and she bundled the money into the case again and buckled the straps.

'Oh, Priscilla, won't you tell us?' they cried.

'I'll come right back. But I must take it to mother. You can be getting the dinner ready. You'll find everything in my bag;' and she went off, the iron box clasped in her arms.

‘Oh dear! I suppose she’s right, but it would have been jolly to count it ourselves!’ wailed Dorothy Ann. ‘There were pots of money there—quite a thousand pounds, I’m sure! I feel like the boy in *Treasure Island*! But I wish it had been all in gold pieces!’

‘She’ll be back in half-an-hour. Let’s do as she said, and get dinner ready.’ Katharine was investigating the contents of the rucksac. ‘Bread—packet of butter—packet of salt—nicely packed in a jolly little pan—lots of eggs,—plates—spoons—it must have been heavy! Cake—three apples—biscuits; quite a ripping little dinner! Where shall we set the table?’

‘Hadh’n’t we better cook the eggs first? There’s not much room. How did she mean them to be done? I suppose that’s what the pan’s for. Shall I put them in and stick them on the fire?’

‘Yes; but don’t you want water in the pan?’ Katharine made the suggestion tentatively, not quite sure of her ground.

‘I don’t know! Do you? I’ve never boiled an egg.’

‘Strikes me we ought to know,’ Katharine said shamefacedly. ‘It’s rather awful not to know how to boil an egg. How old are we, Dan?’

‘Five,’ said Dorothy Ann solemnly. ‘I used to think I was thirteen; but that must have been a mistake. Shall we risk it?’ and she held the pan over the fire.

‘No, don’t. If we ought to put water in, it will go and get burnt or something, and that will spoil the pan. Priscilla will roar at us; but I really don’t know,’ Katharine confessed.

‘She didn’t bring any water!’

The argument seemed to Dorothy Ann unanswerable, till Katharine crushed her swiftly. ‘Because there’s heaps in the beck outside. It’s running like a torrent. She wouldn’t think of bringing water.’

‘Shall I get some, then?’

‘I don’t see that it could hurt the eggs to have a little water. It couldn’t get inside them.’

Dorothy Ann made a hasty trip in the rain, and returned with the pan full of water. ‘How are we going to know when they’re done?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know! How can you tell with an egg?’ Katharine asked helplessly. ‘I don’t suppose it will change colour, or go soft. Some things go soft; I know that, because you have to keep feeling them. But we know eggs don’t.’

‘They don’t change colour; that’s quite certain!’

‘And some things bubble, but’ — —

‘You can’t expect an egg to bubble!’

‘I know water bubbles when it’s ready to make tea. They ought to teach girls this kind of thing at school,’ Katharine said indignantly. ‘Fancy us wasting our time on algebra when we can’t boil an egg!’

‘It is rotten,’ and Dorothy Ann surveyed the eggs gloomily. ‘I shouldn’t have the faintest notion when the silly things were done.’

‘You ought to know, Dan; you’re the oldest!’

‘I don’t know the first thing about cooking. I guess we’d better not risk it.’

‘Well, we know they’ve got to boil. We might let them begin doing it, anyway. I guess it will take them some time; the water’s stone-cold. Perhaps Priscilla will be back before they’re done,’ Katharine suggested brilliantly.

‘But how are we going to know? It’s not a bad idea, though. Do you put them in at once, or wait until the water’s hot?’

Katharine looked at Dorothy Ann blankly. ‘D’you suppose it matters? Oh, would you have thought there could be so many ways of boiling an egg?’

‘We don’t seem to have struck one way yet,’ Dorothy Ann chuckled. ‘I’m going to boil the water

And when Priscilla returned in less than an hour, she found them watching a boiling pan, which had had to be refilled more than once because the water would persist in boiling away.

'Oh, did you wait for me? I hoped you'd have had your dinner. You poor things, you must be starving!'

'We thought it would be jollier to have it all together,' Katharine said demurely.

'Oh, well, the eggs will only take three minutes, as the water's boiling,' and Priscilla dropped them carefully in.

Dorothy Ann winked solemnly at Katharine, who was trying to listen intently without betraying herself, and so be prepared another time.

'Will you time them, Dorothy Ann? You have a watch, haven't you?'

'Time them? Oh—er—yes, of course, Priscilla. Three minutes, did you say?'

'You don't want them hard-boiled, do you? They're new-laid.'

'No, of course not,' Dorothy Ann said hastily. 'Three minutes, then! Time's almost up.'

'I'd like mine done hard,' Katharine said suddenly, intent on gathering information.

'Oh, give hers five minutes, then, Dorothy Ann. But it isn't so good for her; she'll have indigestion.'

'She doesn't generally like them hard,' began the unimaginative Dorothy, and stopped short at the glare she received from Katharine.

Fortunately Priscilla was stuffing her mackintosh and sou'-wester into a crack between two rocks, and did not notice the series of grimaces which passed behind her back. As she turned to them again her face was very bright, and the girls forgot the eggs as they cried eagerly, 'What did your mother say, Priscilla? Wasn't she surprised?'

'How much money was there?' Dorothy Ann asked breathlessly.

'And how is your father now?'

'Asleep; they say it's a very good sign, and we're not to try to wake him, but just to wait for the doctor.—Surely those eggs are ready, Dorothy Ann?'

'I forgot all about the silly things!'

'You are a brilliant cook!' Priscilla laughed. 'We'll let Katharine's have its full five minutes. Mother was very much surprised, of course, but she isn't angry with me. I was just afraid she might be. Of course, she's awfully glad we've found the money. It means we can do so much more for father.'

'And all of you. Will you go back to school?'

'We haven't had time to think about that yet. I expect they'll want me to. If I go to any school, it will be yours. I think I'd like that.'

'But how much money is there, Priscilla?' cried Dorothy Ann.

Priscilla looked at them wide-eyed. 'Seventeen hundred pounds!' she said.

BOOK II.
THE SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

A GLOOMY MAY-DAY.

Katharine Mayne was curled up in the corner on top of the little cupboard in the kindergarten-room.

The big 'kinder' was a favourite resort of the elder girls out of school-hours and on unusual occasions. The first day of the summer term was one of these special occasions, and the big room was crowded. New-comers hurried there in search of friends as soon as they had greeted Miss Chinchin; all were exchanging holiday experiences and making plans.

Katharine's cupboard stood in a corner close to the big bay-window. The window looked to the front-door, but there were bushes in the way which cut off the view of arriving visitors in a very annoying fashion. But by climbing up on to the top of the cupboard it was possible to see over the bushes and get a glimpse of the front steps, and there was keen competition for the position in consequence. This time Katharine had secured it, and meant to keep it until she had seen what she wanted. Various girls begged for a turn, and if they were small enough she hauled them up one at a time for a few minutes. But she would not give up her place to any one.

'You know I'm watching for Dorothy Ann!' she said reproachfully to one who was more insistent than the others. 'As soon as ever she comes I'll get down, and you can all fight for it. But I'm not going to budge till I've seen her.'

Menie and Van, the two seniors, came strolling in, arm-in-arm. The Scots girl had beautiful red hair and a softly freckled skin, with deep-blue eyes, and was tall and graceful. Van was shorter, and very dark; her hair and eyes blue-black.

'You won't get Dorothy any sooner because you've seen her on the steps, Katharine,' Menie pointed out. 'She'll have to go to Miss Chinchin first, all the same.'

Van laughed. 'But it's a satisfaction to know she's in the house, isn't it, Kathie?'

Katharine wriggled impatiently. 'Of course it is! If you hadn't seen Van since February, Menie, and it was the 1st of May, you'd be a wee bit excited, perhaps. I don't believe you would, though. You'd sit quiet till she came in, and then you'd just look up and say, "Oh, Van, is that you? I hope you're quite well?"'

'I should mean just as much as you do; all the same,' Menie said seriously; while Van and the rest laughed. Katharine's tone had been such an exact imitation of Menie's quiet, slow manner.

'You're sure your Dolly Ann is really coming back this term, Kath?' Van inquired, as they passed on. 'Perhaps she's still in Switzerland with her aunts.'

'Oh no, she's home. I had a letter. One of the aunts died, and the other one has come home with Dorothy Ann and her mother.'

'She must have had a ripping holiday! Nearly three months in Switzerland! And all last summer she was out of school! I must say Dolly Ann manages things jolly well;' and Van and Menie passed on to find friends.

Katharine said nothing. It had been a severe blow to her when Dorothy Ann had been taken out of school early in February to go with her mother to Switzerland. But Aunt Dorothy, the invalid, had died, and Aunt Ann had seemed so utterly lost and alone that Mrs Nairn had not had the heart to refuse her request that she should come and keep her company for a time, and that she should bring Dorothy Ann also. The old lady had nursed her sister for the last five years, and in all their lives they had never been parted. Now she was very desolate, and seemed almost unable to face life alone at seventy. Mrs Nairn had hurried to comfort her, and

had even consented to take Dorothy Ann out of school for the rest of the term, on the understanding that they would return for the beginning of school in May.

Dorothy Ann had been delighted, of course. The thought of three months in Europe, and the chance of seeing France and Switzerland—Paris, Berne, Geneva, Lausanne—had been fascinating. She had comforted forlorn Katharine by the reminder that it was ‘only for three months,’ and had laughed at the indignation of the other girls and their pointed references to her three months’ holiday of the previous summer.

But, apart from the question of parting from Katharine, there had been one tinge of regret in Dorothy Ann’s joy. ‘Nothing’s ever quite perfect, however jolly it is. There’s always something to be sorry about!’ she had decided mournfully. She wished that she could have stayed at school till half-term, even had it meant losing two or three weeks of her time abroad; for Priscilla was to come to school at half-term, and Dorothy Ann would have liked to be there to welcome her.

Many letters had passed between the girls since that exciting week in January. Every one had been excited as soon as the news was known, from Matron down to Lizzie the housemaid—every one except the unconscious cause of it all, and his slow recovery of speech and memory had given them added reason for joy. Katharine and Dorothy Ann had gone off to school reluctantly when their week was over, but Priscilla had been very good in keeping them posted in all her news. They had rejoiced with her in her father’s gradual recovery, and had shared her mingled joy and regret when her parents had left the hospital for an east coast resort, where it was hoped the sea and moorland air together would restore him to complete health. Then had come the news that Priscilla was to join them at school; and immediately following upon that, Miss Nairn’s pleading letter had called Dorothy Ann and her mother to Switzerland. It had been hard on Dorothy, and she had been sorely disappointed that she must go at that particular time. It was all very well for Van Evans to say, ‘Dolly Ann manages things jolly well,’ but it had not seemed quite so satisfactory to Dorothy herself.

Katharine, perched on her watch-tower, glanced at Priscilla and sighed. They had travelled from Yorkshire together, and had arrived before tea, so had had time to unpack and change into their school frocks. Priscilla, like all the others, wore her green sailor gym. costume, with belt, tie, and trimmings of brown braid, and the brown shoes and stockings on which Miss Chinchin insisted. As Katharine had once said, ‘Everybody looks nice in that shade of green, whether it’s black girls, like Van, or red ones like Menie, or fair, like me, or brown, like Priscilla and Dorothy Ann.’ Katharine’s sigh was because Priscilla was not strolling up and down arm-in-arm with any one, or even talking to anybody. She was sitting at one of the low tables, writing a note to her mother telling of their journey—a most improper proceeding on the first evening of the term, in Katharine’s opinion. A post-card would have been quite enough. Priscilla ought to have scribbled that, just to satisfy Miss Chinchin, and then have joined the crowd eagerly discussing plans for the term. Instead, she sat there scribbling ‘reams,’ as Katharine thought indignantly, and did not seem to have anything to say to anybody.

She did not even look up when Phyllis, who always knew everything, came in and was immediately surrounded by a noisy crowd.

‘Any news, Phyl?’ ‘What’s the latest?’ ‘Picked up any gossip yet?’ ‘Oh, I say, she has got something to tell! Just look at her face!’—this last from Katharine’s corner. She did not leave her post, but turned from the window for a moment to wait eagerly for the answer.

Phyllis sat dejectedly on one of the long tables used by the kindergarten children. The room was big and bare, furnished with four of these low tables and still lower ‘baby’ forms, at which the seniors were wont to look amusedly as they laughed and said, ‘Was I ever small enough to sit on that?’ Now they sat on the tables, and found them just the right height.

'I'm just full of bad news!' Phyllis announced tragically. 'Will you have it all at once, or in bits?'

'Oh, I say! Tell us quick and get it over!' and everybody gathered round her except Katharine and Priscilla. Katharine stood up on her cupboard, so that she looked over the heads of the crowd. Priscilla sat listening gravely.

'I don't know which is the worst bit! Here goes, then! Mademoiselle's left!'

'Oh—Phyl! And without saying good-bye? Or letting us give her a present? But why? Did she know last term?' cried Clare, another Third-Former.

'Yes. She wouldn't tell us because she didn't want to say good-bye all round. She's sent a letter instead. She says she knew she'd cry and we'd all cry, and she couldn't stand it, so she asked Chinny to say nothing about it.'

'We can send her a present, of course. I'll take on that job;' and Van Evans produced pencil and paper. 'Now, girls, contributions quickly, please!'

'There's more bad news,' said Phyllis, with gloomy enjoyment.

'Oh, get it out quickly, then! We can stand any blow now,' said Van.

'Miss Chinchin can't get the cricket-field this summer. The man won't let it to us again. He's going to build rows of little houses on it. And she hasn't been able to find another one.'

'Oh, but—I say! That's nonsense! We simply can't'—Van cried, in dismay.

'Then won't there be any cricket this summer?'

'Nor tennis? Nor basket-ball? Oh—oh, *I say!* That is too awful!' groaned Clare.

'This is terrible, you know! What does she expect us to do all summer?'

'Chinny says we'll have to go for long country walks,' said Phyllis, with infinite scorn.

'Walks! Country walks! Oh, my goodness!'

'What a gloomy prospect! Wish I hadn't come!'

'It's simply hideous.' Even Van looked extremely sober, not relishing the thought of being senior girl in a school which seethed with discontent from the very first evening. 'Can't we do anything? We simply must have games!'

'We might send a petition, or a protest, to Chinny,' Menie Macdonald suggested, in her quiet, practical way.

'Good idea! You must take that in hand, Menie.'

'It won't do any good. She says there isn't another field to be had anywhere near enough,' Phyllis insisted.

'Oh, but there simply must be!' Van argued desperately. 'It's cruel! It's—it's disgusting! That man ought to be shot! Couldn't we sue him, or something?'

'Couldn't we get one farther away? We wouldn't mind the walk,' Menie suggested.

'Put that in the petition. We don't mind how far we walk—five miles, if need be. There are plenty of fields about! She could get one if she really wanted to,' Van said in disgust.

'She won't have one that's far off, because it would take so long to get to it,' Phyllis observed. 'I heard her say so to mother.'

'What silly stuff! As if we didn't like the walk!' exclaimed Van.

'You were groaning at the thought of walks a moment ago,' Menie pointed out.

‘You aren’t making it all up, are you, Phyllis?’ and Menie eyed her suspiciously.

‘No; it’s all the awful truth!’ said Katharine. ‘She’s feeling bad herself, too, though she’s trying to get some fun out of it by piling it on for us.’

‘Fun! There’s not much fun about it! And there’s no piling on needed. Listen to this! The one who’s coming in poor dear Mademoiselle’s place isn’t French; she’s only English! Isn’t it hateful? I do think we might have a proper French mistress, anyway. This one teaches heaps of languages; but it’s not the same.’

‘Oh no, it’s never the same! We’ve always had a proper Mademoiselle before!’

‘Chinny must be trying to do things on the cheap this term,’ said Van.

‘I don’t see why an English one should be any cheaper than a French one,’ Katharine argued. ‘I think it will be rather jolly. She won’t be so likely to catch you in corners and let out streams of French at you, and then shrug her shoulders and say “Oh, *là-là!*” when you stare at her. I liked Mademoiselle all right, but I did hate it when she talked French at me.’

‘But that was what she was here for,’ said matter-of-fact Menie.

‘Oh, kids like you can’t understand!’ Van said impatiently. ‘It’s not the same thing at all. Her accent could never be like Mademoiselle’s, for one thing.—What’s the creature’s name, Phyllis, and where does she come from?’

‘Miss Chinchin told mother all about her,’ Phyllis said importantly. ‘She’s Miss Tarring, and she comes from America.’

‘America! Worse than ever!’ Van groaned.

‘Why?’ persisted Katharine; but no one took any notice of her, and as she would not leave her cupboard and had to keep one eye on the front steps, she had to be content to be left out in the cold.

‘Oh, she isn’t an American! She’s an old friend of Chinny’s, and she used to teach here before Mademoiselle came, about ten years ago. Then she went with all her people to America; but now she’s decided to come and live in England again.’

‘Ten years ago! Then she must have known Margaret, and Joan, and Winifred!’ Katharine wailed. ‘Oh, I say! I’ll be a frightful disappointment to her, and I shall hear about it all the time!’

‘Katharine’s grievance again!’ Van laughed. ‘She’ll expect you to live up to your sisters’ reputation, Kathie.’

‘I know; they all do. It’s awfully mean, and silly too. Well, she’ll just have to be disappointed, and disgusted, and surprised, and all the rest of it, that’s all.’

Phyllis continued her story, and launched her final item at them. ‘And she’s bringing four new girls with her—*four!* All nieces! Four American girls in the school!’

The news was received with the silence of blank dismay. It was not a usual time for new girls to join the school, and somehow every one had taken it for granted that the personnel would be the same as it had been all spring, and that the friendships and ‘sets’ would go on unaltered. But—four new girls! The loss of Mademoiselle had been the first hint of change; this was the last straw.

‘Four! Why, they’ll be in everything! One you could forget, but four!’ groaned somebody.

‘I hate having mistresses’ relations in the school!’ Van said hotly. ‘D’you remember Ethel Sharpe, Miss Chinchin’s niece? She always used to sneak away and tell her everything—things there was no need for her to know!’

‘But Ethel always was that kind of girl,’ Menie pointed out. ‘These American girls may be quite different. There’s no reason they should be sneaks.’

dormitory. It only holds four, but they've put in an extra bed for the baby. One of them's quite a kid. So if they want to tell aunty things they'll have plenty of chances.'

'Ugh! They'll talk us over every night! This term's going to be hateful; I feel it in my bones!'

'It *is* hateful!' Van said in disgust. 'And I suppose if there are four of them they'll be all ages; we shall get them all through the school. Do you happen to know their names or ages, Phyl?'

'There's a big one and a baby, so I suppose the others are In-Betweens.'

'The big one will be a nuisance,' Van frowned. 'We don't want her. The baby won't count much. You and Katharine can have the In-Betweens.'

'Thanks!' said Phyllis and Katharine together.

'I believe,' began Katharine suddenly while the news was still being discussed—'I believe they're coming in now! There's a taxi, and it's awfully full—bursting with girls, and heaps of luggage. And—oh, there's Dorothy Ann! How clever of her to come just at the same minute!'

'Dolly Ann always works things jolly well,' Van laughed. 'Now we shall hear all about the Yankees!'

CHAPTER II.

DOROTHY ANN'S AUNT ANN.

Dorothy Ann, arriving in the big 'kinder' a few moments later, was not surprised to find herself the centre of attraction and a person of much importance. She had expected it. After three months abroad it was only natural, and she had been looking forward to recounting her adventures not only to Katharine and Phyllis, but to crowds of interested seniors. The point which surprised her, and annoyed her slightly till she understood, was that the crowd which surrounded her immediately was not interested in her experiences, at least at the moment. It was not herself they welcomed, but the news she brought.

Katharine, of course, came flying down the passage to meet her, having been waiting at the door, and hurled herself upon her in a wildly joyful embrace. But when she led her in in triumph, the questions which descended in a storm on Dorothy Ann were all about the American girls.

'Did you see them, Dorothy Ann? What are they like? Did you hear their names? Are there really four of them? Does Miss Tarring look as if she could be nice?'

'You must know something about them, Dolly Ann,' Van remonstrated, as Dorothy looked blank. 'You must know more than we do, anyway. You came in with them. Were your eyes shut?'

'I don't know yet what you're all jabbering about! Oh, is it those new girls who came in the taxi? The door burst open and streams of girls came out. Their mother was with them. No, she was too young to be the mother of the big one. Perhaps she was their aunt.'

'No, she isn't. Well, yes, of course she is their aunt! I didn't mean that. But that's not how she matters to us. She's our new French mistress instead of Mademoiselle, my child,' Van explained.

'I say! Has Mademoiselle left?'

'Yes. And the new girls are all Miss Tarring's nieces from America. Now you know as much as we do. Tell us what they're like! How old do they look? Are they dark or fair? Do they look like Americans? What do they wear? Did you hear their names?'

Dorothy Ann sat on one of the low tables, and took the questions one by one. 'I didn't hear their names, of course. I only saw them for half-a-minute. Then I went in to speak to Chin-Chin-Chinaman while they were getting down the luggage. I couldn't stand and stare. The little one was jumping all over the place; I should think she's a lively kid. She looked about nine. The big one's as tall as Menie, with lots of fair hair; and the baby's very like her, but her hair's cut straight round at the back—awfully quaint. The other two' —

'The In-Betweens, Phyllis calls them.'

'They're quite different; they can't all be sisters. The middle two are as dark as anything—as dark as Van, or darker. I guess their mother was a Red Indian; regular blue-black hair, and long and straight, and dark eyes and faces. They all had on long coats and, oh, some kind of hats! So I couldn't see very much. That's really all. The big one was helping with the luggage, and the baby was tugging at a bag that any one could see was too heavy for her—any one but herself, of course. She thought she could manage it, but she couldn't; so the biggest In-Between said, "I'll do that," and called her some name ending in Bell, and went to help her.'

'And the other In-Between? What was she doing?'

'Oh, she was staring up at the house, as if she was awfully struck by it, and I heard her say, "Isn't it just lovely? I never thought a school would be so pretty as this!"'

'Shows

'Now tell me everything! I'm sure I've done my share. Has Mademoiselle really left? Why? And why aren't we having another French one? Oh, and who's cricket captain? Van?'

There was a general groan.

'Cricket! Oh, Dolly Ann, you haven't heard the awful news yet,' said Van.

Dorothy's dismay, when the situation was explained, was as keen as theirs. A summer term without cricket and tennis was unthinkable. There would be nothing to live for. 'We might as well go home at once,' she said gloomily.

'Of course, there's the mistresses' tennis-court in the garden. Perhaps they'll let us use that sometimes,' Menie suggested.

'Sometimes! I dare say they will; but what's the good of that? We want it all the time, and several courts at once! Now don't try to comfort us, Menie, for it can't be done. We're all hopelessly in the dumps. But you might draw up that petition. I'll help, and we'll get it signed, and present it to Chinny to-morrow morning.'

'But it won't do a scrap of good,' said another senior gloomily.

Dorothy Ann was looking thoughtful. 'I say!' she said suddenly. 'I've something to tell you all. I didn't think there was any hurry about it, and these things seemed so much more important. But I'm wondering if it won't matter a good deal to us, after all. Not having the field will make such a lot of difference to everything.'

'It just knocks the bottom out of everything for the whole term! What have you got to tell us, Dolly Ann?'

'You know my people live just a few miles away, out in the country? And you know mother and I went to Switzerland to be company for my aunt Ann, because Aunt Dorothy had died?'

'Why aren't you wearing black for her?' Phyllis asked critically.

'They didn't want me to, Aunt Ann especially, and we tried to do everything she wanted. She's over seventy, and she was awfully lonely at first; it's frightfully sad for her. They'd always lived together, and she'd done everything for Aunt Dorothy for years; she just seemed lost without her. But we cheered her up a lot, and took her travelling about, and at last we persuaded her to come to England. She has no home, because they sold their ripping old house five years ago, when they decided Aunt Dorothy would have to live abroad. It was an awfully jolly old place down in Devonshire, where they'd lived all their lives together. I stayed with them often, and I just loved it. They had lovely old furniture, and they stored that and their books and pictures in London; but they sold the house altogether, because they knew Aunt Dorothy would never be able to live in it again, and Aunt Ann said she could never bear to go back there without her. So, when she came home with us a month ago, she had to find a new house.'

'Won't she live with you?' Menie interrupted, her eyes fixed sympathetically on Dorothy Ann's face.

'Not altogether. She wants to have a home of her own, and send to the warehouses for all her things, and have them all round her again. And we live too far in the country; it's only a few minutes by train, but she wanted to be where she could drive in when she felt like it; she's not keen on going in trains. So she looked about for a house, and she thought it would be nice if she could find one near my school, so that I could come and see her often. Of course, mother and father will come often too; she thought if she could be about half-way between me and them it would be right. So she's taken'—Dorothy paused dramatically and looked round at their curious faces, which were merely interested, but showed that no one had foreseen, and certainly no one had realised the importance of, the news she had to tell—'she's taken Waterside!'

'Waterside! That lovely old house by the river, with the island, and the pond, and the huge gardens and orchards? Oh, I say! She must have heaps of money!'

'Oh, heaps! There's only her now, you see.'

'You're very lucky, Dorothy Ann!' Menie said soberly. 'Fancy having Waterside for a kind of second home!'

'Let's all be friends with Dorothy Ann!' suggested somebody, laughing.

'I say, Dolly Ann, I'm awfully fond of you! And I get on awfully well with old ladies!' teased Van. 'They always like me! But I want to know why you're telling us all your family history. What has it all to do with us? It's jolly for you, but' —

'She said it might matter a good deal to us,' Katharine put in swiftly. 'She hasn't finished yet.'

'Oh, well, go on quickly, then, Dolly Ann!'

'If you call me that, my aunt will never forgive you if she hears you. She hates to have names messed about. Mother's name is Margaret, and she's always been called Peggy; but Aunt Ann won't have it. She calls her Margaret every time. She'll call you Myfanwy, and Menie Marion.'

'I don't suppose she'll take the trouble to call us anything. When is she going to get the chance?'

'Haven't you left out a paragraph, Dorothy Ann?' Menie asked seriously.

Dorothy Ann laughed. 'I'm afraid I have. Aunt Ann's awfully shy; but in a funny, quiet way she's frightfully keen on girls. She used to watch all the girls in the hotels we stayed at; she never dared to speak to them, but she was always looking at them and listening to them, and she used to watch when I tried to make friends, and ask me afterwards to tell her about them. She asked heaps of questions about school and all of you. She says she knows Katharine and Priscilla already, because of the stories I told her! So, when she decided to take Waterside for six months, to see if she liked it, before buying it altogether, she asked if I thought Chinny would let us all come and enjoy the gardens sometimes. So I thought it might be something instead of cricket. It won't be as good, of course; I know that. But it would be something. I don't see why Chinny shouldn't let us go—on Saturdays, anyway. We'd be all right there, and we'd be out of her way, and Aunt Ann would love it. I don't suppose she'd ever *speak* to any of you, or at least not till she'd got used to you; but she'd watch. She'd love it if we made a row, and she'd look on when we played things. There's tennis—two courts—and a croquet lawn.'

'Couldn't she let us have a field for cricket?' Van's eager question rose above the chorus of delight.

'There's no field. It's all gardens. I'm afraid cricket's off,' Dorothy Ann said regretfully. 'But there are other things. The gardens are awfully jolly.'

'But would she really have us there?' Menie asked doubtfully. 'Why should she? It's far too good of her.'

'Because she'd enjoy it herself. I tell you she'd love it. I haven't had time to ask Chinny yet, because of the new girls; but Aunt Ann really wants us to go. She's moving in this week, and the house won't be all right for a week or two, but the gardens are ready for us at once. I was afraid

we've been out for walks? It's been standing empty for months. There are big greenhouses and summer-houses, and the river splits in two just there and runs round a long narrow island, all trees and bushes, and that belongs to the garden too. I hope they haven't tidied up the garden too much; it looked so beautifully wild.—I say, Dorothy Ann!

She put her question eagerly, and Dorothy Ann laughed. 'I begged Aunt Ann to leave some of it, so there's a great patch of jungle, as wild as can be; and they haven't spoilt the island.'

Katharine sighed happily. 'Jungle! What a relief! I was afraid it would be all flower-beds and lawns!'

'No fear! I saw to that, and Aunt Ann quite understood.'

'You made her understand, in fact,' Van laughed.

Dorothy Ann nodded, and slipped out of the group, leaving them still discussing her news. She took Priscilla's other arm, and they walked up and down the big room. 'Well, old girl, how are you getting on? It's a change from the moor, isn't it? Which do you like best? Why didn't you come and speak to me, instead of sticking in a corner?'

'Because there were so many others, and they'd known you so much longer than I had.'

'That's just like you, Priscilla!' Katharine said indignantly. 'You shouldn't stop to think whether people want you or not. You should just feel sure they do, and then fly at them.'

'Should I? I don't feel so sure about that. I might be an awful nuisance sometimes, and that would be hateful. I'm getting on all right, Dorothy Ann. I had to catch up a lot at first, of course, but I've had half a term to do it in. I think I'm up to the rest of the Fifth now.'

'Oh, I don't mean *lessons*!' Dorothy Ann said scornfully. 'Are you making friends, and all that? Do you like our school? It's quite the jolliest one in existence, you know. And how is your father? Where are they now?'

'Still living quietly at Runswick. They get both sea and moor there, and it's doing father a lot of good. He's quite different, you know.'

'How? Tell me! You haven't been writing to me since you came to school,' Dorothy Ann said reproachfully.

'I'm sorry, but there's so little time, and I had to write to them. And Katharine used to write and tell you all the school news.'

'And so she thought you wouldn't want letters from her too! Isn't she a donkey, Dan?' observed Katharine.

'An awful donkey! Katharine didn't tell me your news, silly! Now tell me all about your father.'

'He's not strong,' Priscilla said slowly. 'I don't think he ever will be. But he's quite all right—not the least like he was at the hospital. He doesn't remember very much about his illness, and it's a good thing. But he knows he was ill for a very long time, and that we couldn't find the money. He knows how we lived at the hospital, and he must guess he was rather bad all that time; but he doesn't ask questions about it. He isn't fit to do any work, of course; if he had any big strain it might upset him again. But so long as he lives quietly he's quite all right, and he may live for years. Mother and I never dared to hope he'd be all right again. She's happier now than I ever remember seeing her. There's no need for him to work or worry, you see. There's money enough for them to live on quietly, and in a few years I shall be able to help. I'm going to be a teacher, and a good one!—

sea, or anything. When I shut my eyes I can see the moor, all soft dark brown, and sometimes I long for it till I feel almost sick.'

'When I see she's feeling that way I let her talk to me about it, and then we talk about the holidays, and it quite bucks her up,' Katharine added.

'Yes; Katharine always knows, and it does help. I miss the wind so dreadfully. There's no real air down here, and it isn't clean and fresh, as it is with us. I suppose it's with being so near London.'

'Why, we're quite out in the country here!' Dorothy Ann said indignantly.

'Are we? Then the country must be different. It's not like home. I feel all limp and sleepy for the first few days down here.'

'You look all right;' and Dorothy Ann surveyed her. 'I like the look of you in your gowns. That green suits you; I knew it would.—And she does her hair nicely, doesn't she, Katharine?'

'Hadn't you better go and get your hat off?' Priscilla laughed. 'It's almost supper-time.'

'I forgot the early supper on first night! I suppose the gong will go in about three minutes. Yes; I'd better run. Wonder if we'll see the new girls at supper!' and Dorothy Ann vanished upstairs.

CHAPTER III. FOUR NEW GIRLS.

Supper at Miss Chinchén's was at seven for the small children, and eight for the Middle and the Upper School, except on the first night of the term, when the whole school met in the big dining-room at half-past seven. It was the first meal at which all were present, for many girls had not arrived by tea-time. After supper on ordinary nights the Middle School girls went off to bed; but the Fifth and Sixth Forms were allowed an extra hour, a privilege much prized by them, and much envied by the juniors. In winter they gathered in groups in the firelight; in summer they wandered in the garden, or sat in the big kindergarten-room, which had French windows and a flight of steps leading to the lawn, and spent the time in chat and gossip, with fancy-work or crochet.

On this first evening all went in to supper with the same idea which had occurred to Dorothy Ann. Would the American girls be there? When and how were they and the new mistress to be introduced? What would they be like? How soon would there be a chance to make friends—or at least to find out if it was desirable to make friends? There was a certain attitude of suspicion among some of the girls, born of the fact that the new girls were related to a mistress, and therefore undesirables; but every one felt that it would be necessary to know something of them before deciding whether they were to be accepted or treated as outsiders. The fact that they were foreigners, and had only just arrived in England—Phyllis insisted upon that—was sufficient cause for curiosity also. Every one was expectant, and very curious.

To a certain extent they were soon satisfied, but not entirely. Miss Chinchén sat at her own table at the head of the room, and Miss Tarring sat beside her. She was tall and very dark, with a great deal of black hair, a clear dark skin, and soft black eyes, which Katharine instantly acclaimed in a whisper as 'understanding.' Her fears of being confronted at every turn by her brilliant predecessors began to fade; Miss Tarring did not 'look that kind.' The general opinion among the girls, formed at their first glance and never altered, was that Miss Tarring was extremely good-looking, 'far handsomer than poor dear little Mademoiselle,' but very foreign in appearance. Could there be any foundation for Dorothy Ann's remark about Red Indians?

Two nieces, the elder In-Between and the 'baby,' sat on Miss Tarring's left hand, and the other two on Miss Chinchén's right. So, though there was no chance of speaking to them at present, the eyes of the whole school could, and did, rest on them, and the girls formed their own opinions of the accuracy of Dorothy Ann's descriptions.

The eldest was a tall, pretty girl of sixteen, with a quantity of fair hair drawn back and tied loosely with a big bow. The nine-year-old baby had the same fair hair, hanging in a straight, heavy fringe just above her eyes, and cut square round her neck, with a big bow standing up at one side. Both she and the tall girl had very dark eyes, which contrasted oddly with their light colouring; whether they were black or very deep blue no one could decide for some time.

The other two sisters were very unlike them, except in one particular—all four had the same dark eyes, 'like purple pansies,' was the general verdict. These two, aged about fifteen and thirteen, had blue-black hair like their aunt's, very long and heavy and straight, worn tied back with ribbons. These details were absorbed by the whole school during the first few seconds, and before Miss Chinchén had said grace; and so was the fact that they were all dressed alike. All four wore loose white 'middy' blouses and dark skirts; even the baby's little blouse was of the same pattern.

One other fact was soon common property, but was noticed first by Katharine, and passed on by her to Dorothy Ann, who started it on its way round their table. The big girl and the younger In-Between did not talk much; that was natural enough, seeing they sat next to Miss

Chinchen under the eyes of a whole new school. Occasionally the elder girl murmured some remark; the younger one looked shy. But the other two, the elder of the dark-haired girls and the baby, talked all the time, in undertones, of course; there was no trace of shyness in the big dark eyes even of the little one as she surveyed her future classmates calmly, and the elder girl's fearless gaze flashed back defiance, curiosity, amusement, challenge, equal to those she felt directed at her from every quarter.

'That black girl has got cheek!' Van murmured, as the stranger kept up a stream of low-toned comments which continually reduced her little sister to giggles, and at last drew forth an obvious rebuke from her aunt. 'Now she's getting it hot! I don't wonder. I believe she's been saying things about us.'

'She isn't shy, anyway,' Menie observed.

'Shy! She doesn't know what it feels like to be shy. She's got cheek enough for six.'

'The other two look more shy. I like the big girl's face,' said Menie. 'I wish we knew their names.'

'They made a mistake when they put those two to sit together! It looks as if the Chinaman had arranged it, and as if she doesn't know them very well yet. They seem to have the two noisy ones at one side and the two quiet ones at the other.'

'You'd have thought it was a very good arrangement, though, big and little at each side. It's just what I'd have done myself,' Menie observed.

'I don't believe Miss Tarring would have done it,' and Van glanced from the giggling youngest girl to the serious elder one. 'You'd have thought the two who look so much alike would *be* the most alike, wouldn't you? But they're not; that's a fact!'

Katharine and Dorothy Ann, at their table, were also discussing the strangers.

'I like the little dark one's face,' Katharine decided. 'She looks quiet and jolly.'

'I like the bigger In-Between! She's got a jolly lot in her.'

'Dan, I couldn't tell you while she was with us; but I'm bothered about Priscilla.'

'Why?' Dorothy Ann glanced at Priscilla, sitting at the seniors' table. 'She hasn't much to say, has she? Now Van's talking enough for a whole cricket-team. Is Priscilla always quiet like that?'

'Yes; that's what's wrong. She doesn't talk.'

'What's the matter with her?' To Dorothy Ann's mind all healthy girls talked.

'I mean, she doesn't talk to the others. She's all right with me; but—well, she hasn't made friends. That's what's the matter. She's had a whole half-term here now, and she's still an outsider. And I don't know what to do.'

Dorothy Ann frowned. 'Sure? Who is it she doesn't get on with? Van? Menie's usually jolly enough to new girls.'

'I don't think it's their fault. I believe it's her own, and I've told her so.'

'Now what do you mean, Katharine? Priscilla wouldn't be nasty to anybody.'

'I've told her so. But she hasn't made any real friend, and nobody can do it for her. It would only make things worse to say anything to Menie or Van.'

Dorothy Ann nodded. 'Aren't they nice to her?'

'Oh, they're quite all right! But that's not the same as being friends.'

'No. But she's got you and me.'

'Yes; but we don't count for so much here as we did in the holidays,' Katharine said wisely. 'There's nearly three years between us, and two Forms. We can't be with her much, and, anyway, we're only kids here. She's a senior, and she ought to have friends in her own Form. We can't do much.'

'We can't do anything to put things right,' Dorothy Ann sighed. 'If she's started wrong, I suppose she'll have to go on wrong all through. I'm awfully sorry. No wonder she's lonely, and wishes she was back on the moor! It makes all the difference having friends. You don't think it would do any good if I tackled Van? I'm not scared of her.'

'She'd look you up and down, and say, "My dear kid, please mind your own business!" And then you'd want to kick her. You know you always say you don't like it when Van looks at you as if you were a worm.'

'Menie, then? She's all right.'

'Twouldn't do any good. Priscilla would find out, and things would be worse than ever. You can't ask girls to be friendly. I've heard them say Priscilla's "queer," because she's so quiet and keeps so much alone. You can't go and tell them she's not.'

'She'd been out of all school things for nearly three years,' Dorothy Ann mused. 'She'd find it difficult to get into our ways at first, and by the time she'd got used to it I suppose the harm was done. I don't see what we can do, except be extra nice to her ourselves.'

'That's what I thought. But sometimes I just want to shake her, when she comes in and never speaks to anybody—just sits down with a book, or begins to write a letter.'

'Do it next time you feel like it,' Dorothy Ann advised. 'I hope I'll be there to see. Katharine Mayne shaking a Fifth-Former! It will be quite exciting!'

Katharine laughed. 'Chinny's going to make a speech. Now we'll hear the American girls' names.'

'Let's guess! Sadie, and Mamie, and—oh, Sally, and Belle! I'm sure those sound American!'

'Sally? The others are all right, but I'm not so sure of Sally,' Katharine said doubtfully.

'Lulu, then! The baby's sure to be Lulu.'

'You said her name ended in Bell.'

'Then one of the In-Betweens must be Lulu.'

It was past bed-time for the juniors, and Miss Chinchin's speech was short. She knew there would be no surprise in anything she had to tell. It was with intention she had called on Phyllis's mother a few days before. She found

the First Form. I am sure you will all give them a hearty welcome and make them feel at home. You may leave your seats now;' and she left the room with Miss Tarring and the other mistresses.

'Not a Sadie or a Mamie among them!' Dorothy Ann murmured disappointedly. 'What is that second girl's name? I didn't catch it. Did you?'

'Mel—something; that's all I heard. Leonora's pretty, but it's too long,' said Katharine.

'We'll call her Nora. So the baby's does end in Bel.'

'Annabel's pretty too; they're all pretty. Pretty to look at as well!' Katharine decided.

'Who's going to make first move? Van or Menie ought to make a speech. I hate being introduced!'

Van was saying the same thing to Menie. 'It's always an awkward moment. Afterwards you wonder why you were so silly. I never know what to say.'

'It's worse for them.' Menie knew she ought to make the first advance, but hesitated.

The strangers had hesitated also, taken by surprise by the sudden departure of the mistresses. Leonora looked after her aunt, as if she would have liked to follow her; and Katharine, noticing, saw Bernice slip a comforting hand through her arm. Then Bernice faced the crowd with a smile which had just a touch of shyness in it.

The second girl, with the mysterious name, put her elbows on the table and her chin between her hands and proceeded to stare quizzically at the schoolgirls, quite at her ease, and quite obviously determined to force them to do their part and take the first step, no matter how long she waited or how uncomfortable she made them. Her great black eyes danced as they hesitated; but she stared steadily and relentlessly, till even Van stirred uneasily. The baby, Annabel, after a glance at her, proceeded to copy her, adopting the same attitude, with chubby little arms planted firmly on the table. The gaze which was so disconcerting in the elder girl was merely ludicrous on her round little face, however; and instead of helping to stare her new friends out of countenance, Annabel broke the spell of surprise and shyness which had held them. Led by Van and Dorothy Ann, who collapsed at the same moment, the whole school broke into a shout of laughter, and the dark girl turned indignantly on her little sister.

'Annabel, you did that! Why d'you need to go copying me, you silly? I wanted to see who could stare longest!'

'I wanted to,

call me Dolly or Dot, I won't answer. This is Katharine; that's Phyllis. The quiet girl sticking at the back is Priscilla. Now, what are you?"

'Some names! Priscilla! Katharine! Dorothy Ann! I'm Melda—Imelda, but you can cut it short. It's Spanish. It was grandmother's name; they say I'm like her.'

'Spanish! Is that what you are? We thought you were Red Indians, you and the other one.'

A queer look shot from Melda to little Annabel, who looked up at her quickly, as if about to speak. Bernice laughed, and Melda said hastily, 'No, not Indian. We had a Spanish grandmother, and Leo and I are like her.'

'Only to look at, though,' Katharine remarked. 'The other one, Leo, isn't like you really, is she?'

'I say!' said Melda admiringly. 'You have been using your eyes all supper-time! Did you get anything to eat?'

'Oh, was I staring?'

'No; you only looked occasionally.' Dorothy Ann said promptly. 'No one could help seeing how much she talked.'

Melda laughed. 'I ought to have been put next to Leo, and Annabel with Berny. That's the usual way. Miss Chinchon doesn't know us yet.'

'We tried to guess your names, but we could never have guessed Melda.'

'Dorothy Ann was sure one of you would be Sadie, and one Mamie. She thinks all American girls are called Sadie and Mamie.'

'Oh, but we aren't Americans! Don't you think it! Not for half-a-minute! At home they called us "You English girls." Annabel's the only American among us.'

'I am, too!' Annabel was hanging on her sister's arm and listening eagerly.

'Oh, but how? We thought you all were.'

'Not a scrap,' Melda insisted. 'We went to America ten years ago. We were born in England, all but Annabel. Say, have we picked up much accent? They laughed at us there, because they said we talked so English.'

'It's not so bad as I expected,' Dorothy Ann said candidly. 'I thought you'd talk with a fright

‘It does sound funny when you do it. I tumble into it without thinking, I suppose. You don’t mind coming away from your sister, do you?’

‘Not since you came to fetch me,’ Leonora said. ‘I thought I’d just wait and see if there was anybody who’d bother to do that. If everybody forgot all about me, then I’d just wait with Berny. But I guess you’re nice, since you remembered and came for me; so I’d like to come.’

Katharine looked down at her curiously, surprised by the shrewdness which could make her ‘wait to be fetched,’ and form her judgment, on their kind-heartedness by the result. Then she tucked Leonora’s hand under her arm. ‘Oh, well, come along! You’re going to be in our Form, so you’d better make friends quick.’

‘I want to see the garden. The front of the house is so pretty.’

‘Tis jolly, isn’t it? It’s an old country-house made into a school, you see. We’ll go into the garden in a minute; but we’ve something to do first. You and the rest had better sit down for to-night.—Come on, Dorothy Ann, and all you other lazy things! Let’s clear away; then we can go out. It’s stuffy hot in here.’

‘Stoofy hot!’ murmured Leonora, and watched curiously as Phyllis, Dorothy Ann, and the rest began to clear the long tables. At the end of the room Priscilla was already putting plates and knives in neat piles.

Menie explained to Bernice and Melda, while Van went to bring some big trays. ‘Miss Chinchin likes us to do certain things, and clearing away after meals is one of them. Maids are very difficult to get, you know, especially near London, and she’s nearly always short of somebody. She says it doesn’t hurt us to do small jobs, and I don’t suppose it does. It saves the servants, and when there are so many of us it doesn’t take long.’

‘We’ll help!’ Bernice and Melda spoke together. ‘Oh, yes, we’d like to! We couldn’t possibly watch you all being busy. I can’t sit still and look on at other people working. I’ll do that;’ and Bernice went quickly to take a tray from Katharine.

‘Thanks! It’s just *rather* big for my arms.’

‘I like the idea,’ Bernice said to Menie. ‘We always used to help at home.’

‘Some of the girls grumble, and new ones don’t like it at first; but they soon get into the way of it. It really only takes a minute.’

‘Is there anything else we can do?’ Melda demanded, as the big trays were handed through to the waiting-maids.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE SILVER RINGS.

Katharine was already acting as guide to Leonora, whose appreciation of the old house and garden pleased her greatly.

‘We use the back-lawn, with those steps where the seniors are sitting, coming down from the kindergarten-room. There’s a pile of cushions just inside the door; you mustn’t sit on the steps without a cushion, because they’re stone, and people get chills and illnesses that way. Miss Chinchin’s very particular about the front-lawn; there’s a tennis-court at this side, but the mistresses usually use it. Some of the girls have gardens along the side of our lawn. Oh yes, you can have one, if you like!’ in answer to Leonora’s eager question. ‘All behind here is the kitchen-garden and orchard, and we’re not supposed to go in there without permission; the little gate’s kept locked. But during the summer we have to help to pick the fruit. There are heaps of it, and it takes so long to pick enough for us all. They make jam and tarts and puddings, and we’re supposed to help to get the fruit ready.’

‘I’ll like doing that. Who are the little girls Annabel’s with?’

Katharine looked, and laughed at sight of Annabel, the stranger, with a small girl on each arm, making a hurried tour of the garden before bed-time.

‘The dark one is Van’s little sister Gwen, and the reddey one is Jeanie Macdonald, Menie’s sister. Annabel isn’t shy, is she? It hasn’t taken her long to make friends.’

‘Annabel *shy*?’ laughed Leonora. ‘I guess not!’

‘I can see she isn’t. Now come and talk to some of the other girls. We always sit round the steps. The babies will have to go to bed in a minute, and then it will be our turn. Here’s Meg; she’s Menie’s middle sister. She’s in the Third with us. And Phyllis, and Irene and Violet—those two are sisters, and Violet always does what Irene does. Van says she’s just Irene’s shadow. And this is Clare; she’s awfully musical. And, of course, Dorothy Ann!’

Melda had returned from her tour of the upper regions, and was sitting on the top step with Dorothy Ann, hearing all about the tragedy of the cricket-field. Katharine and Leonora, slipping into a corner beside them, shared a cushion, and listened to the talk of the seniors on the steps below. Priscilla, a writing-pad on her knee holding her unfinished letter, sat on a

She was hardly prepared for the effect of her simple question. All three girls turned to look at her, and then looked at one another. Then Bernice said hastily, 'Oh, you mean for cooking! Of course we did—several. Can you make a good fire in the open air? Melda's great at it—far better than I am.'

'Can you make fire with two sticks, as the Indians do?' Melda asked.

'No. Will you show us? What could you want a camp fire for, except cooking?'

'We had a camp fire once—Dorothy Ann and I,' said Katharine; and Dorothy Ann's question was forgotten, and the quick look which flashed from Melda to Bernice again passed unnoticed. 'It was up on the moors, in Yorkshire. Priscilla lived there, and she lit it for us; we'd never have managed it ourselves.' Priscilla looked up from her letter and laughed. 'It was in a little, wee cave, and we had our dinner round it, and boiled eggs in a pan.'

'Oh, Katharine Mary Mayne! Who boiled the eggs?' cried Dorothy Ann, with dancing eyes.

'Priscilla. We didn't know how,' Katharine said calmly.

'Didn't know *how*?' There was a chorus of delight from the rest.

Dorothy Ann chuckled as Priscilla looked up again quickly. 'Oh, we didn't tell you, Priscilla! We told you we thought it would be nice to wait till you came back. I don't mind owning up now, but I wouldn't have told you at the time. We hadn't the faintest notion how long they needed, or when they'd be done, or how you could tell. So we thought we'd wait, and you never guessed.'

Priscilla laughed. 'Oh, I never guessed! I thought it was so nice of you to wait for me.'

'We hoped you would,' Katharine said complacently. 'It was just a chance we put any water in the pan. Dorothy Ann was going to put the eggs in, and put it on dry; but I was sure that couldn't be right. I thought there had to be something to do the bubbling, and we knew the eggs couldn't.'

'You dreadful children!' Menie looked scandalised, while all the rest laughed, and Melda rocked in her seat.

'The country was lovely as we came down from Liverpool, and all so *neat*! English fields and hedges are just dainty.'

'You should say up from Liverpool,' said Dorothy Ann.

'Oh! But why? We came down by the map,' Bernice argued.

'Yes; but you were coming to London. You come "up" to London, no matter if you're in the Hebrides.'

'How funny! Is that really so?'

'I say! London people have some cheek!' cried Melda. 'London's the centre of the world, of course!'

'Oh, of course!' Dorothy Ann assented; and they laughed again.

'The hedges were all white as we came along,' Bernice continued. 'It looked like snow. Would it be may? Auntie was asleep, so we couldn't ask her.'

'It's too early for hawthorn; it's never out on May-day. Blackthorn, then! The flowers come before the leaves.'

'That's it. It was very pretty. And yellow dots on the railway-banks, like drops of gold. What were they?'

'Oh, little dandelions, I suppose,' Dorothy Ann said vaguely.

'Coltsfoot,' said Priscilla, looking up suddenly.

'I forgot you were there!—She knows every flower under the sun, Bernice. I say, Melda's making notes!'

Melda laughed, and bent over a notebook she had taken from the pocket of her middie blouse. 'All your flowers and things are different over here. I'm going to make lists. I feel real silly; just a dunce! I don't know the first thing. What's this ripping bird up on the house here, saying, "Stick to it! Stick to it! Pretty dear! Pretty dear!"?' He says everything twice over.'

'Browning!' said Van solemnly. 'Oh, I don't mean that's his name!' hastily, as Melda began to scribble again

‘That’s my stunt too,’ Melda said, in a business-like tone. ‘We’re all going to hustle round and find out; then we won’t feel so silly. Tell me some more! We want to hear your cuckoo. Ours only says “Cuck-cuck-cuck!” Oh, what’s that cute little blue-and-yellow bird upside-down on the coco-nut?’

‘Only a tom-tit—a blue-tit, you know. Katharine Mayne put the coco-nut up last term, but there’s nothing left in the shell now.’

‘Say, let’s get him another one! He’s a dainty little chap. We don’t have him either.’

‘Why do you all dress alike?’ Katharine asked curiously of Leonora.

Bernice heard the question, and answered promptly, ‘Well, I like that! Here are dozens of you all dressed in green frocks, big and little, all the same, and when four of us wear middy blouses you ask why we’re all dressed alike!’

‘Oh, well, these are our gyms! We wear them all the time in the house and garden. You’ll need to have some too,’ Katharine explained.

‘Ours are what we had for camping. So we wore them for travelling too.’

‘Oh, I see! What a pretty ring, Leonora! May I see it?’

Leonora handed her a silver ring, with circles and other designs upon it, and Katharine and Dorothy Ann examined it curiously.

‘What does it all mean? Is it ancient Egyptian, or something? Are these suns and moons? What’s this bunch of stick things in the middle? Do you wear it all the time?’

‘It’s a keepsake from some girls at home.’

‘Oh, how jolly! Did they give it to you to remember them by? Have the others got them too?’

Bernice and Melda laughed, and took off their ‘keepsake’ rings and handed them round, and looked at one another with laughing eyes as the girls

their dressing-gowns, and they brushed their hair and discussed their new friends till the last possible moment.

‘It’s a jolly good thing they have the little dormitory to themselves, after all. We can talk about them so much better,’ said Dorothy Ann, coming out with her brown locks streaming over a pink gown, and looking a wild object indeed.

‘They aren’t shy, are they?’ and Katharine turned a shower of yellow curls over her face and began operations. ‘Even Leonora isn’t, really; she’s only quiet.’

‘Shy! Not much! You could never leave them outside things! They simply walk into everything and take it for granted everybody’s going to be friends at once. Of course, it’s all right; they’re jolly, and we’re quite glad to have them. But they don’t wait to be asked.’

‘Except Leonora; she did. It’s funny how keen they are on finding out things. Lots of girls wouldn’t fag.’

‘Rather jolly, though. I think Melda’s going to be good sport. She’s the Americanest of them all.’

‘Americanest! What an awful word, Dan!’

In the small dormitory at the end of the passage, where Annabel lay already asleep, the three girls who wore the silver rings were similarly engaged. Their thick, long hair took time to brush, whether it was fair or black, and they had much to say.

‘They’re real quick, aren’t they?’ laughed Melda, speaking low lest Annabel should be disturbed. ‘They’ll find us out, Berny, sure as eggs.’

‘They’re getting on. I didn’t think they’d get warm so quickly,’ Bernice admitted. ‘They nearly had us over the rings;’ and all three laughed.

‘Poor Annabel! It was mean not to give her one, wasn’t it?’ Melda laughed.

‘And about the camp fire! “Did you have a camp fire?” Dorothy Ann quite

CHAPTER V.

A PLACE FOR A CAMP FIRE.

'I've found a name for Bernice, Melda!' Katharine announced on Saturday morning, after a few days' consideration.

'Oh! What is it?'

'She's "Bernice I'll-do-that,"' Katharine said solemnly.

Melda chuckled. 'Sure she is! You do hit it off, Katharine Mayne! You're some smart, you are!'

'But your name would do for her, and hers would do for you, just as well. She wants to know, and you say you'll do things, and Leonora's just the same.'

'What's Leo's name?'

'I haven't decided yet. She doesn't say as much as you do. Leonora-Mouse, perhaps.'

'But, I say, Melda!' Dorothy Ann broke in, 'Bernice will get bullied into all kinds of things, just because she is so jolly willing, if she doesn't look out. Van shirks awfully sometimes. More than once already I've heard Chinny tell her to do things—fetch the little ones in, or take them out, or send somebody to her—and if Bernice or you says, "I'll do that," as you do all the time, Van just slacks. *Her* name ought to be "Thanks awfully, old girl!" She gets out of all she can. You shouldn't encourage her; it's bad for her morals. After all, she is head-girl.'

'Menie's finding Bernice jolly useful too,' Katharine added. 'Why d'you do it, Melda? I shouldn't bother if I were you. Let them do their own work, lazy things!'

'Tisn't worth talking about, little stunts like that!' Melda said carelessly.

The Third Form and upwards will be ready to start at half-past two to-day. The juniors will go next week.' The faces of the little ones fell. Every one realised, however, that for a first visit at least the whole school could not be inflicted on one old lady, and that the upper Forms must have first chance. The small girls dispersed into the garden, and the Middle and the Upper School hurried upstairs in much delight to change from gym. costumes into afternoon coats and skirts and white blouses.

Dorothy Ann and Katharine slipped away half-an-hour before the others set out two by two, and by special permission Priscilla went with them. Miss Nairn's letter had begged that her niece might precede the others, 'as I am not used to the ways of schoolgirls, and shall be glad of her help.' Dorothy Ann had obtained leave to take the other two with her, as she was anxious to introduce them privately to her aunt, and Miss Chinchin, who had taken Priscilla's measure very quickly, had been glad for her to go with the other two as a steadying influence.

'I can understand your wanting Katharine,' Priscilla said, as they set out. 'But are you sure your aunt wants to see me? I don't see why she should.'

'Because she's heard so much about you, my dear. She knows all about us on the moor, and the hospital, and the Hen and Chickens Rock, and everything. She said she'd like to meet you. I don't for a minute think she'll come out and speak to the crowd, you know. She'll be far too scared of them. She'll be too busy, or have a headache, or make some other excuse. That's what she wants me for, I expect—to make excuses for her.'

'Scared of them? Dan, how could she be? What is there to be scared of?'

'Nothing; but she won't believe it. She's a dear, silly, little old thing; but she's as shy as shy, and she'll think a lot of girls would laugh at her, or that she wouldn't understand their talk and jokes, and then she'd feel silly. I know just how she'll feel.'

'But it's a pity for us to go, if she feels like that.' Priscilla looked troubled.

There was a wide, breezy common, with an outlook over the woods of Bucks and Middlesex; and the town was an ideal starting-point for country expeditions. Many villages of historical interest lay within easy reach, with memories of poets and statesmen resting in their churchyards under ancient yews and cedars. Waterside was one such village, though its local history consisted only of a gruesome story of murder in a lonely house in bygone days.

To reach the country it was necessary to cross many waters, for the rivers divided, and often overflowed and flooded the low-lying meadows; so many and wide bridges were necessary. First there was the Home River, a sleepy stream wandering past the back-gardens of the outlying houses, fringed with weeping-willows and wild flowers, choked with bright-green weeds in places, and navigated in punts. Then came the business-like canal, with its tow-path and locks and barges, running very straight across country, with one-arched whitewashed bridges; and then the real river, twisting and bending among beds of reeds and rushes, tree-hung also, with no path along its banks. This was the county boundary for travellers on the high-road; but to those who crossed the fields the boundary ran by the Shire Ditch, another swift, gurgling stream, with low foot-bridges of its own. The courses of the various other streams and ditches were marked by rows of pollard willows or beds of rushes, and all the low, damp fields were very naturally known locally as the Water Meadows.

The three girls on their way to Waterside raced down the bank of the Home River, crossed the Shire Ditch, the meadows, and the high canal bridge, and followed the tow-path till another track across the fields led them directly to the village. Waterside, an old gabled house nearly buried in trees, stood on the outskirts of this first red-roofed village two miles from the town. A quiet lane under great swaying elms led to the village from the white, dusty high-road, but the field-track cut off a big corner, and when not flooded was much the pleasanter path.

Dorothy Ann paused as they crossed the great meadow. 'The others will have to go on and out to the village to get to the front-gate. But there's a little gate over here through the bushes; we'll go in by that;' and she led them to the shrubbery.

'Dorothy Ann, my dear!—Have you—have you hurt yourself? Oh, my child, I am sure you are hurt!' as Katharine sat down suddenly on the floor and began to rub her knee.

'Did you knock yourself, silly?' Dorothy Ann asked severely.

Katharine laughed up at the anxious old lady. 'She kicked me when she jumped up on to the window. Wasn't it clumsy of her? I'll have a lump like an egg to-morrow. Oh, it's all right now, thank you!' as Miss Nairn anxiously suggested remedies. 'Oh, please don't put butter on it! It's so greasy. My knee's really quite all right now. But fancy Dorothy Ann kicking out like that!—You've got a hoof like a horse, Dan.'

'Sorry! I never meant to kick you, old girl.—I say, Priscilla, come in! I'm sure you can jump a low window like that. Don't be shy!—Aunt Ann dear, this is Priscilla; you know all about her already. I expect you've guessed the other one's Katharine. Now, dear, why are you dusting books on Saturday afternoon? Surely somebody else could do it? You ought to be lying down. And have you forgotten you've asked a party for this afternoon? They're coming along now—dozens of them.'

'The men only came to put up the shelves this morning, Dorothy Ann,' Miss Nairn explained nervously. 'So I thought—I thought I would just get the books put away instead of coming out into the garden. Your friends will not want to see me. You will tell them I am engaged, won't you, my dear? They will quite understand if you explain that the house is not in order yet, I am sure.'

'Now, Aunt Ann dear, you know that's just an excuse!' Dorothy Ann said severely. 'The books will do any time between now and next Christmas. If you'll let them wait till Monday, one of the maids will do them for you, if they're too busy to-day. Won't you take off your pinny, and come out and wait for the girls? You ought to speak to them and say you're glad to see

to you from the boxes. These are poets, all bound in leather. Where shall they go?"

'I cannot have you working for me, my dear,' the old lady protested.

Katharine entered into Priscilla's intention thoroughly. Springing up, her knee forgotten, she seized a duster and attacked another packing-case. 'You be the C.O., Miss Nairn, and we'll be your subs. Just tell us where things are to go.'

'But your—your leg, my dear child?'

'Oh, I was only putting that on to tease Dorothy Ann! It isn't at all bad, really—just a bump. I suppose if Leonora Tarring was here she'd say I said "joost a boomp!"'

'You did rather,' Priscilla laughed.

'Well, you needn't talk! You do it yourself!'

'But what are C.O.'s and subs.?' Miss Nairn asked anxiously.

Katharine laughed. 'My sister's married to a soldier. Commanding Officer and subalterns—young officers, you know. You tell us what to do. Here's an awfully jolly set of Jane Austen. Where will you have them?'

'Here. Thank you so very much! I thought the poets should go over on this side. I am so very much obliged to you, my dear!'

'Now, Miss Nairn, please!' pleaded Katharine. 'You'll spoil it all if you go on like that. We're awfully pleased to do it;' and they carried and dusted, while the old lady, almost overcome, gave timid directions.

The rest of the school, in the charge of Miss Tarring and Miss Graveson, walked

‘Bernice! Melda! Do stop!’ Van cried at last. ‘Make a bunch and ask Priscilla about them all at once. You’re making me feel so small, I’m afraid I shall vanish altogether!’

‘I wouldn’t have believed I knew so little!’ Menie said in dismay. ‘I *know* all these flowers as well as anything, of course, but I really don’t know their proper names. You don’t want names like “butter and eggs,” and “milkmaids,” and “lady’s slipper,” and “shoes and stockings,” and “bread and cheese,” I suppose?’

‘They’re interesting, and real quaint sometimes,’ said Bernice, ‘but I like to know the proper names as well. I don’t think those others would count.’

‘Count? How do you mean?’ Menie asked curiously.

‘You are funny, you three! Are you having a competition? But you all tell one another each new one you find. How do you mean they wouldn’t count? Are you going in for a prize?’ Van asked, laughing.

‘Oh, we’re counting up how many new ones we can find, you know,’ Bernice said hastily; while Melda and Leonora gazed down at their handfuls of primroses with expressionless faces.

‘I say, Berny Tarring, you nearly gave us away that time!’ Melda remonstrated, as they crossed the fields together.

‘Yes, it was awfully silly. I didn’t think Van would be satisfied so easily.’

‘They don’t know *all* their own flowers and trees, do they?’ Leonora asked seriously. ‘I’ve been asking Phyllis things, but she got so mad that I had to stop.’

‘They don’t know anything!’ Melda said scornfully. ‘I’d have liked to see one of our crowd at home such a duffer!’

